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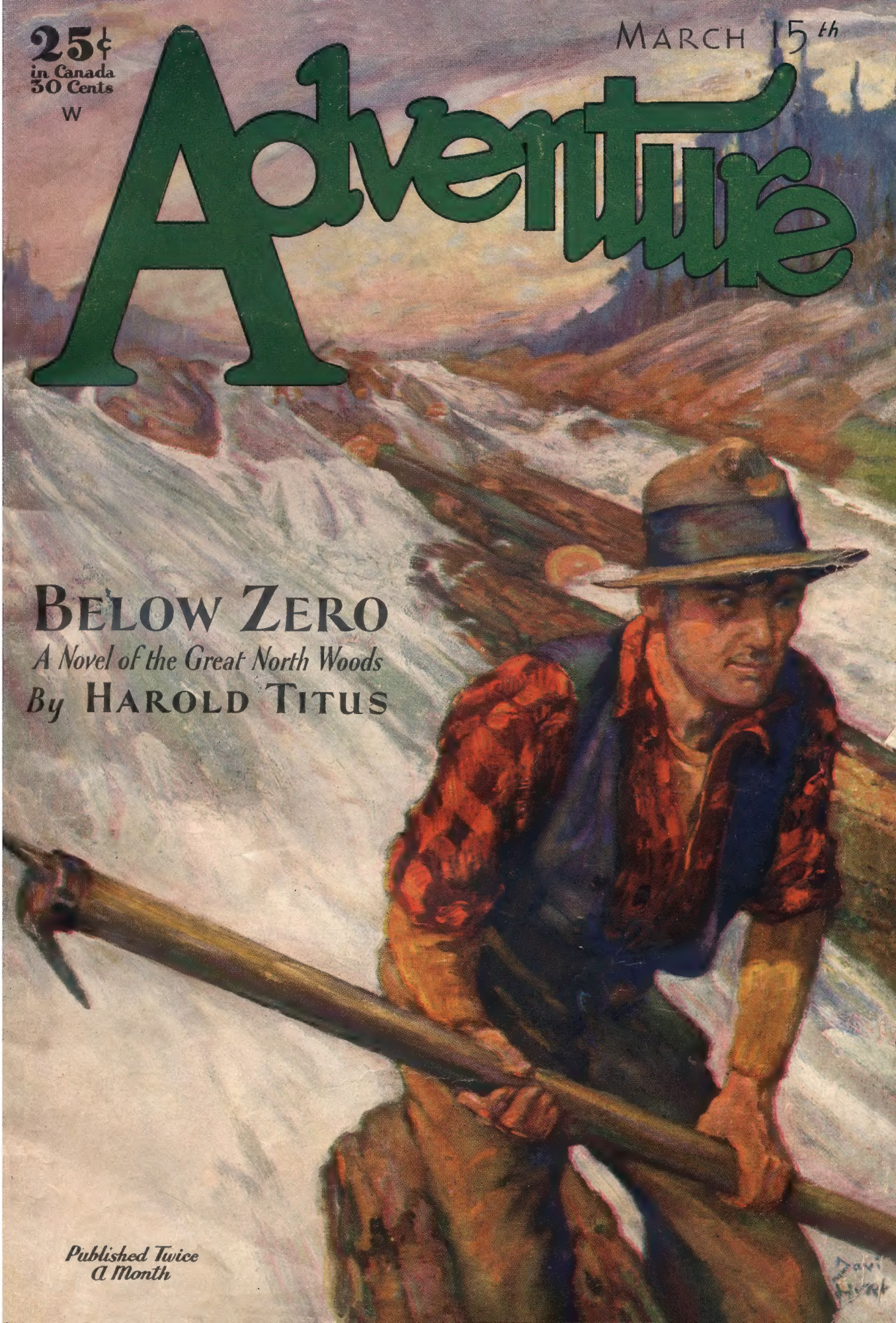

BELOW ZERO

A Novel of the Great North Woods

By HAROLD TITUS

Published Twice A Month

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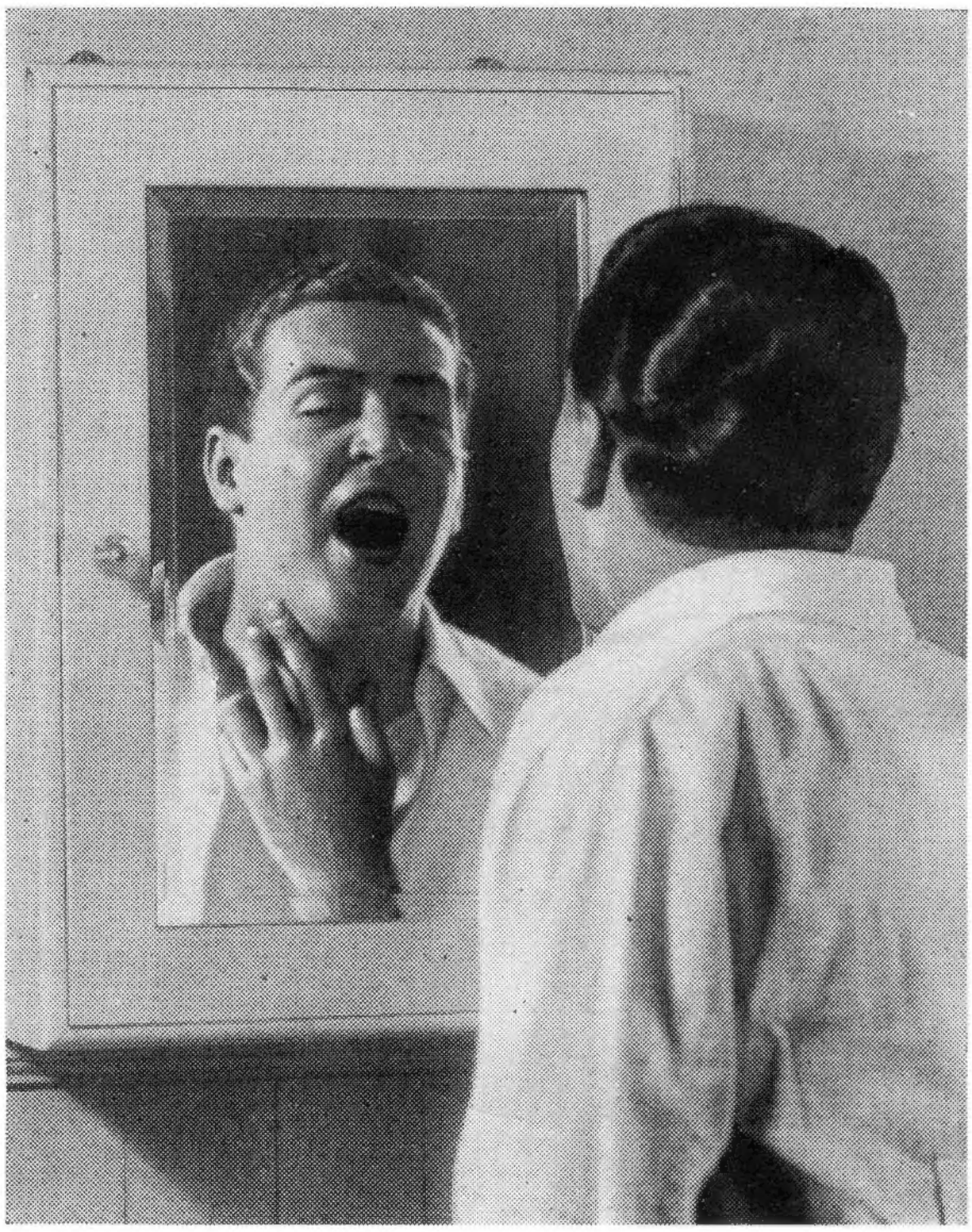

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1930

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Beginning an Epic Novel

BELOW ZERO

By

HAROLD TITUS

CHAPTER I

THE BELKNAP PRIDE

IN HIS young days, Tom Belknap may have squirmed now and then; most men who have undergone the vicissitudes of fortune building in the lumber industry have. But this much is certain: for a brace of decades, if he had occasionally felt discomfiture, he had kept it well to himself, concealed behind that brusk, gruff front.

Now, however, he put on a first rate exhibition of a man in an uncomfortable corner as Harrington, small and gray and amazed, stood in that spacious chamber and stared at him.

Old Tom Belknap had made his assertion with a growl, as he always did when at variance with his aids, and ordinarily that tone ended argument abruptly. Not today!

"But," said Harrington after that long pause occasioned by incredulity, "what's the boy going to say to that?"

"He'll do as he's told!"

"Twice? You'll disappoint him twice, Tom? A boy with—with as much spirit as you have?"

Harrington scratched his thin hair absently and frowned. Belknap, sunk in the depths of that great chair, rolled an uneasy eye at him, an eye which had in it defiance and determination and, perhaps, a hint of appeal.

"Why," the secretary went on, "he took it standing a year ago in June when you sent him from college to Witch Hill instead of to Kampfest. That was a body blow, after all the talk and planning, but you told him to go show what he could do. And he did; he has!

"Now, he's coming here in a few minutes to claim the reward you held out to him, and instead of sending him to Kampfest, you're shunting him off on Belknap 7. It beats me," Harrington concluded.

Belknap fidgeted with his watch chain and cleared his throat irritably.

"Well," he said, "John ain't going to Kampfest yet—not yet!" He shook his head. "No, sir! Not to Kampfest."

Harrington's gray eyes were prying, suspicion in them as he studied the averted face of the man he knew so well.

"Are you in trouble at Kampfest?" he asked quietly, and the old face flashed up at him, the gaunt frame stiffened.

"If I am, it's my own trouble!"

A watcher might not have noticed that Harrington had tensed on his query, but the sudden relaxing of his body was obvious.

"I thought as much," he said grimly, meeting the challenge in those eyes. "I was afraid trouble might follow when you took Gorbel in on this thing. I've suspected things weren't right there for two years now; last month, when you came back from Kampfest, you had the look of a beaten man, and I was pretty sure. Now I know."

"You know a lot!" Belknap said grumpily as he hitched closer to the massive desk.

The other did not respond. With pursed lips he pondered a moment, then burst out quickly:

"Look here, Tom! Why don't you let us help you up there? Why don't you come down off your high horse and let the office straighten things out while you're away?"

Belknap gave a dry and mirthless laugh.

"You're doin' a lot of guessing!" he snorted. "You're guessing at things, Harrington." He swung in his chair to confront his inquisitor and slapped the mahogany with his palm. "Guesswork. I'll admit nothing; I'll deny most. But I'll go this far. If I'm in bad, whose business is it? If I guessed wrong on a man, whose funeral is it? If I've got dirty clothes to wash, whose job is it? Eh?

"From the beginning, you've all been against me on my opinion of Gorbel, from you on down through this organization to—to John himself. You didn't like him; you didn't like the idea of a partnership. John, my boy, warned me after he'd talked to the man twenty minutes. Warned *me!* A cub!

"But I bet on Gorbel. He had options on the layout that would give John and me our chance to do what we've planned, and he wouldn't budge on less than a five-year partnership agreement. Wanted the experience and some of the profits, he said, and I believed him. I went over his record with a fine tooth comb and couldn't find a bug. I got his agreement to sell his share after five years and took him on and all of you yelped and predicted trouble and I made up my mind that the Belknap Lumber Company offices never would be bothered with a line of Belknap & Gorbel business. I put it under my hat, and that's where it stays until it's ready to turn over to John, Harrington!"

His face had flushed and the eyes flared determination.

The other shrugged.

"That ought to be final," he said glumly. "But what frets me, Tom, is when John comes in."

Old Tom stared bleakly through a wide window against which the savage December gale hurled itself in across sullen Lake Michigan.

"That's somethin' else," he growled.

Harrington persistently eyed him and the old man squirmed again.

"There's only one thing a man gets that really matters," Tom said finally. "That's his reputation. And a man's reputation narrows down to what certain folks think of him. I'm known as honest, which is as necessary as good health. I'm rated rich, but I give a hoot about how much the Belknap Company's worth or the value of any of the outfits it owns under other names. I'm glad I've a name for bein' a hard fighter, gladder that most people concede I fight fair. But there's only one thing that gets in close—" he paused—"that's what John thinks of me."

Silence for a moment, except for the buffeting of the gale about that Chicago skyscraper.

"You've got three kids, Harrington. I have only one—and a humdinger! That cub— Hell's bells, a man can't say what he feels on some things! Nobody'll ever know how hard I tried to play up to what he's thought of me ever since he was so high; nobody ever can know what a burden it's been to be the kind of a party he thought I was." The rough voice had become a monotone now, as though he fought for self-control.

"He opposed me just once; he warned me just once. Him, a kid, warnin' me about my judgment of a man! I laughed

at him and— Well, I laughed at him and—"

Harrington supplied—

"And he was right."

"Another guess—" in another surly growl. "But—" looking up again, face furrowed with intense earnestness— "if that was so I'm not admittin' it; and if it was so, would you let him find it out first? Would you let him come to you and say 'I told you so'? Not on your life, you wouldn't!

"You wouldn't let him even suspect that the thing he'd worked for and waited for wasn't what he'd expected! You wouldn't let him think that the one present he'd wanted was marred before it got into his hands. Not much, you wouldn't! You'd fix it up, somehow, even if the trouble was so mysterious you couldn't locate it, before you handed it over so—so the estimate he'd had of you wouldn't lose anything of—of what it had. Then you'd tell him he'd been right, but not before."

He waited a long moment.

"Wouldn't you?" he insisted.

"If I had your devotion and the Belknap pride, Tom, I expect I would," Harrington answered gravely. "But the devil of it is that you're leaving today for Europe, and won't be—"

"Yes! The devil of it! And the devil of it is, the damn' doctors are right! I'm no fool, Harrington; I know that they know. I know when they say I need three months in a place where business can't reach me that I'd better hit the grade for that place. Well, nobody but the doctors and you know this trip's forced. I ain't going to worry anybody. A big timber operation can't go to hell in a heap in ninety days. I'll be back; I'll be fit to go into the Kampfest thing with sleeves rolled up, find out just what and how much is wrong and I'll set it for John as we'd planned it'd be."

"But don't you see that while you're away the office could—"

"I wash my own dirty linen!" Tom said through clenched teeth.

"But suppose, Tom, something should happen?"

The old man shook his head, half in negation, half in agreement.

"I'd have to come clean, then, I guess. I've prepared for that." He opened a drawer and took out a sealed envelop. "I wrote this last night. It's for John if—if some cathedral should fall on me. If I come back, I want it back from you. And if I don't come back you might just say, Harrington—say to the boy that—that he was a humdinger. Will you?"

The strong voice shook a trifle as Harrington eyed the firm pen strokes, inscribing the name of John Steele Belknap on the envelop.

"Sure, Tom," the secretary said just a bit huskily. "Sure thing. And I hope he'll go to Belknap. But remember he's got his father's pride; he's high strung. You can't give a colt too much bit even to save him a fall!"

CHAPTER II

CHIP O' THE BLOCK

AND a half hour later in that chamber, the brain housing of vast industry, a young man was about to burn up.

A big young man, this John Steele Belknap, tall and broad and thick of chest. Out of place, he looked, in this room with its deep napped rugs and heavy hangings. He wore a maroon checkered mackinaw, stagged pants clinging to stalwart calves; feet in the greased pacs were spread a bit, as if to meet an assault.

Out of place, those garments, in such quarters; exotic, the faint aroma he exuded, a mingling of the odors of smoking bacon grease and tobacco and drying woolens; the sweet scent of swamp timbers and the ammoniac suggestion of horse barns: the unmistakable sense mark of the shanty man.

His face was weather bitten but a bit pale, now, and his nostrils dilated though he fought to keep at least a vestige of good humor in the deep blue eyes and the semblance of a grin on the wide mouth by telling himself to stay by it another

minute, to hold the old dander down just another second.

Old Tom, staring through the window, trying to still the racing of his heart, struggling to hold his voice steady, to maintain the only sort of front he knew how to use as fortification in intervals of emotion, growled—

"Don't tell me what you're good for or what's good for you!"

The lad drew a slow breath and shook his head as the last of the grin disappeared.

"But don't you see, Tom," he began, "that it's what I've worked and waited for all these years? It wasn't any plan of mine, in the first place; it was yours and knocked for a loop the plans I'd made for myself. I didn't want any help from you. I'd always figured on hitting it off for myself to see how good I am, just as you did and grandfather did. I wanted forestry school and got it and thought when I'd finished that I'd hook up with some other organization and see what I could do and, if I checked out, would then get in here with you and help pull the load.

"Then you got this idea, this big idea. You said the Belknaps had all the money any family had a right to have, and I guess you're right. You said enough of us had put in their lives gathering dollars. You wanted to develop the one, big, ideal operation in Northern hardwoods; you talked like an evangelist or an—an architect with a vision, or something like that. You carried me away with the notion. We could go on making money, you said, but it wouldn't be the chief object. We'd do selective cutting, we'd experiment with wood utilization, we'd find out a lot of things that people should know about the forest industries. We'd leave something behind us besides devastated acres and more money."

He paused and wet his lips and shook his head, smiling wistfully.

"It got me, Tom. It—I can't tell you how it made me feel, to think that I was going to jump in with you right off the bat and try something that nobody else had ever dared try before. I worked like a fool on the campus, getting all the theory I could; I lay awake nights dreaming about it!

"Then you stumbled on to the location and the properties that fitted like a glove to the plan. You couldn't wait for me to start, of course. You had to go ahead, because if any demonstration is going to be of account it's got to show profit, and big timber holdings can't be carried along without operating any more. You and Gorbel got the mill up and running, the best mill ever built. You got the chemical plant operating. You were going to exercise your agreement with Gorbel and buy him out and we'd go to it—you and I—together."

He extended one hand in a little gesture.

"And when I thought I was ready for that, I went up to Witch Hill. I'll admit now that it was a bitter dose. But I took it, didn't I? I stayed on longer than you'd said I'd have to stay before getting my finger into the Kampfest thing. I've been waiting for months for word that I could drop it, and the word didn't come.

"We wound the job up last week. When I knew you and mother were going today I got the last of the equipment loaded, the last chore done and high-tailed down here without even stopping to buy civilized clothes because I thought —Kampfest at last! And instead of that I'm told that I am now superintendent at Belknap 7!"

HIS LAX fist fell on the desk and he nodded as if wearied and dismayed.

Still, old Tom did not look at him. He stared through the window and conjured the only defense he had against things rising in his breast, against that conflict between his sense of fairness and his pride. His face darkened and his jaws set ominously.

"Don't like it, eh? Roils you!"

A bull's-eye, that! Right as a die! Roiled the boy was, and darker color went flooding into the bronze of his face, his nostrils dilated, the last of the tolerance was wiped from the clear eyes.

"Yes," he said sharply. "Beginning to roil me!"

He stood a bit straighter and the hand gripping the Scotch cap clenched into the cloth.

His father sniffed and rattled the sheet of paper he held.

"That's the trouble with you young gaffers. Don't have the guts to wait. Got to jump in and learn jobs from the top down. Stuffed shirts, for God knows how many years; yes men. You won't take the time to learn from the bottom up."

"Doesn't that mean anything?" John asked with a curt gesture toward the paper in the age mottled hands.

The man's eyes dropped to that scrawl, written on the letterhead of the Witch Hill Lumber Company. He read it once more:

> To whom it may concern dear sir. John Steele has worked as camp foreman here for one year. He is only a kid but as good a logger as ever wore sox. Respy.
>
> — J. McIVER, SUPT.

The lowering of his face concealed from the son's burning eyes the pride which swept it and John could not know the warmth which the words generated again in the old heart nor the chagrin and fear which rose at what he was now doing. But the belittling grunt and the gesture of dismissal as he tossed the letter back to the desk top made the boy stir on his feet and tighten his lips.

"Sandy," old Tom growled. "Sandy, writin' a recommendation!" He laughed. "Think he's ever done that for anybody before? Not much! Why, he was so rattled he left out the only part of your name that counts. Done it for you because he liked you. As my old-timers always've done, he probably babied you from the time—"

"*Babied!*" The interruption was hot with anger. "Babied me, did he? Damn' funny babying, I'd call it!" The boy laughed bitterly. "I know what went ahead of me to Witch Hill. Sandy told me, when it was all over. You ordered him to see what kind of a Belknap was left after the college professors got through with one. You told him to make it as rough for me as he knew how."

John nodded choppily, that brisk, irate gesture.

"And what of it?"

"This!" The young man flung his cap into a chair and slapped the desk. "I didn't squawk! I didn't even ask for a fair break. It was June, with the black flies so bad Sandy couldn't keep road builders in the woods. He put me in there with what he had left of a crew and I stuck. I was the only one of the gang I started with who stayed, and when we wound up I was boss!

"Did I get something better then? Guess again! I swamped, I drove team, I went with the loading crew and every place I was put I set the pace for the rest of 'em. Yeah. College boy. Getting sandpapered because he was son of the push!"

He nodded once more, a bit white now.

"Four things I'd proved I could do better than anybody else there. Four! Saws, next. Could I get a partner to stay with me even at the money I made for him? I could not! They brought in a Finn who'd never found a man to stand his pace; he hoisted his turkey the ninth day and went out with his tail dragging and when Swanson got sick there was nothing else to do but put me in to run the show, was there?

"You know what happened then. Sixty cents a thousand I saved you below anything that's ever been done at Witch Hill, and when we were winding up the job at that. And the boys liked me. I had 'em working their heads off for you and showed the lowest labor turnover they'd had in the country since God knows when. Stuffed shirt? Yes man? Hell, sir!"

"My," said old Tom with forced sardonic mildness. "My, you're proud, ain't you?"

The boy caught his breath as though for a stormy denial; checked himself and flared:

"You're damned right I am! It showed what I can do on one job; it gave me something to go on when I ask for the

bigger one that's been promised me." His voice trembled. "You'd admit it to anybody else, too; you'd admit it of any other kid who turned the trick. Then, sir, why the devil won't you admit it to and about me?"

His fist fell to the desk again, but this time with a sharp thud. Tom Belknap's eyes left that burning gaze and he stared again through the window.

"No," he said dryly, as if to end debate with himself, and the suggested alteration of his face which had threatened, perhaps, a melting, a softening, came to nothing. "It goes back to where we started. I'm runnin' this outfit yet and hiring men and putting 'em where I think they'll do me the most good.

"One thing," he propounded, "you've got to learn is to know men, to get along with men. You don't like Gorbel—"

"No! I never have! Neither does anybody else around this outfit! You've got a price on his interest and even if you aren't ready to buy him out I won't lock horns with him. Let him run the office and the mills; let him run the bank. I want to get into the woods, Tom, and at Kampfest. There'd be no conflict."

"As I was sayin', you don't like Gorbel, and for no reason I can see. You got to learn why you like and don't like men. You've only been on one job. You try another, now, and come spring you show me what you're wound on." Color was deepening in the lined face and the eyes showed pale against it. "We've had a lot of gabble this forenoon! Here's your letter from Sandy. See if you can make a showin' somewhere else and when I get back—we'll see what we can see!"

He rose.

"That's all then?" John asked, oddly restrained.

"That's all there is. The *Century* leaves in two hours. If you're going to say goodby to your mother you'd better be about it."

The boy stood irresolute, conflicting impulses surging within him. Then with a sweeping movement he snatched up his cap.

"Goodby, sir—" crisply.

"Goodby, John. I—well, goodby."

Their hands met briefly, formally.

"You'll go on to No. 7 tomorrow." It was difficult to tell whether that was statement or query; difficult to tell, too, whether the clearing of the throat had been necessary or not.

"I seem to have my orders," the boy said, and no one could have told what impulse lay behind the words.

He wheeled and went quickly out and for a long moment after he had gone his father stood, a gaunt, wearied old figure. He lifted one hand with a helpless movement and sank into the great chair, chin on knuckles—an unhappy man, helpless to rectify his mood.

CHAPTER III

ROUGHNECK STUFF

NOW, when a young man fever hot with rebellion, at odds with his world, set upon, treated unfairly, finding his firmest trust betrayed, mad to his marrow, steps off a train into a strange town and is hit in the mouth by a stranger, certain events are bound to follow. For one thing, the pressure of temper within him finds relief.

Young John Belknap was as hot with rage this afternoon as the stove in the corner of the smoking car which carried him northward. One must encourage rage when hurt to a point where a little-boy feeling of being set upon gnaws at the very foundation of pride. One must nurse and feed and prod rage or else one's nostrils will smart and one's throat swell.

A slap in the face, he had had yesterday; a blow that knocked him from his balance. But he had regained poise, knowing that only one thing remained for him to do: to chuck it all, to walk out of the paternal home, refusing to accept an unfair, unmerited rebuff. When a man has spirit he can not take a drubbing and then be walked on.

It was easy enough to come to a decision as to what to do; easy enough to decide that the Mid-West headquarters, up in the wilderness, was as good a place

as any for a young man going out on his own to present himself and ask for a chance. Easy, simple.

But not so easy to summon that rage which would wipe out the hurt. He had had his fondest hopes betrayed by the one human being he had trusted above all others. It cut and scourged, made him drive himself into a furious temper.

He had boarded a late train, pack-sack over his shoulder, oblivious to the stares of people in the station, telling himself that he had been doublecrossed, abused to a point which was intolerable. Through the remaining hours of the night he had tossed in his berth, letting that rage eat up the disappointment and heartache. Today, on a less comfortable train, his ire mounted and as the cars rocked and bounced on northward over increasingly rough steel he sat for long intervals without moving a muscle, the fire in his eyes growing, the darkness in his heart deepening. It is not good for a youth to let temper run such a course without outlet, but as yet no fist had fallen on his lips to drain the poison from his heart.

Snow fell. Now and again some of it sifted down from ventilators to the greasy rattan seats of the smoker. The brakeman came in and lighted oil lamps as waning afternoon brought wintry darkness. One more change, now, and he would be on the Kampfest line—but he was not going to stop at Kampfest!

He moved with a start, then, and his jaw muscles bulged. This was the route he had planned so long to take, but the destination was no longer what it had been in these years of planning. On through Kampfest, rather, on for the better part of another hundred miles to Mid-West headquarters. He wondered if this churning rage in him would not overflow as they passed through Kampfest . . .

But he was not to be put to that ordeal this evening.

"You're out of luck," the conductor said, "getting into Kampfest tonight. They got three cars off on a culvert and it may take 'em until noon to get their line open. Tell you what—the Junction boarding house 's a fright. You could go on to Shoestring where there's a good place to stay and come back in the morning in time to get the east-bound."

"Shoestring? Never heard of it."

"Spry little town." The conductor smiled grimly as he adjusted the wick of his lantern. "If the branch hadn't been blocked this afternoon, you might 've seen some big times there tonight."

John did not heed this. He said, "Much obliged," and settled back in the corner of his seat with his wrath.

Soon the brakeman rose and sang out—

"Shoestring!"

Buttoning his mackinaw, slinging his pack-sack to one shoulder, John stood in the end of the car as they jolted to a stop. He was the only passenger disembarking and when he pulled the door open snow sifted down on him. Moving figures showed against the glow of depot lights.

He paused, pulling his cap over his ears, and did not notice that those figures were grouping about the car steps with a purposeful compactness. Eight or ten of them were there and he saw, as he stepped down, that faces peered upward at him.

A voice sang out sharply—

"That's him!"

He dropped to shin deep snow on the platform and a bulking figure moved to confront him.

"You'd better git back on the train," the man said. "You ain't welcome here!"

Men beside and behind the fellow were jostling.

"Check him through!" some one called hoarsely.

"What's the big idea?" John snapped. "Who are you to—"

"We ain't here to argue, Jack! You git back aboard that car and keep your feet out of Shoestring and you'll be better off!"

THE big man grasped his arm determinedly and as John twisted to free himself he slipped. He flung out a hand to catch his balance and, on the gesture, a stinging blow caught him full in the mouth.

An instant before, and despite his black mood, he would have argued; but that fist on his lips dropped a red curtain before his eyes, coagulated all the seething anger which had kept him hot for two days and a night; stripped reason from him.

A shout—

"Sock him again!"

They crowded forward. He struck out at the nearest as he slipped off his pack-sack. They smothered his fists; hands grappled to lift him back up the smoker steps. A man swore stoutly in his ear.

He crouched; he rushed. He was going to let no gang put him back on any train. He bored into them, through them, until he had distance between himself and the steps and then straightened, catching one a stiff blow on the neck that spun him about. Hands clutched at him and he knocked them away, cursing, and whirled and drove his fist hard into a belly.

Voices, then, sharp and profane. Some one caught him on the cheek, and with an uppercut John dropped a man who charged in from the right. The taste of blood on his lips goaded him.

The huge fellow who had ordered him out of town shouldered his way through the group.

"Get away!" he roared. "I'll handle this party!"

But they would not get away. The fight belonged to all of them. Retreating slowly, John fought them off, slashing downward and kicking at a man who tried to trip him. He edged toward the station building, giving ground adroitly to get his back against a wall.

They came on with a rush. He kicked one's feet from under him and the falling fellow tripped another. His head rocked from the impact of knuckles and he saw the big leader gather himself for a second blow. He closed with the man for an instant and slipped back against the building, spinning one about who came in from the left.

He had no inkling of what it was all about, nor did he care greatly. This was a fight to defend himself against numbers and from the first insolent order, from the initial gesture of combat, a savage joy had been rioting within him. This was what a man needed who had been at odds with his world. This let the bitterness and resentment which had been running high in a man's heart find a primordial and most satisfactory vent.

He struck and kicked and elbowed and ducked. His head rocked sideways from another blow and he squeezed his eyes shut for a split instant to check the mounting dizziness. They could have had him down and beaten to a pulp in one minute, if they had used their heads. They were too mad, too eager to carry the fight; they got in one another's way, fended off the blows of their fellows.

Hands found a hold on his feet. He tried to kick and could not. He staggered and a tremendous blow bashed into the pit of his stomach to make him reel and retch and cover up as best he could. Losing, now . . . He hated to lose, even to great odds.

He came out of the momentary weakness to find the group thinned. A man, charging him, checked and veered, and he had a fleeting glimpse of a small figure on the edge of the group, shoving at his assailants, holding up a dissuading hand.

A voice, a girl's voice, was raised sharply:

"Stop! Stop it! Tiny, Ezra, Waybill! Let him alone!"

The "him" was beyond a doubt John Steele Belknap, but that young man was now in no mood to be let alone. The figure of the leader was before him, poised, waiting; perhaps in indecision at the sudden wilting of spirit or intent among his fellows; perhaps waiting on this stranger who was so unwelcome in their midst. If for the latter, his wait was brief, because as he kicked free from those impeding hands John rushed him, striking quickly, with short, savage blows, glorying in this moment of even odds.

The man gave ground slowly. Once he landed and jolted John severely, but this advantage worked against him because it tapped buried reservoirs of strength and

fury, and a frenzied pair of long arms drove their hard fists into his face and head and body, bearing him backward into the light that streamed from the open station doorway.

A cry, then, as John, bareheaded, face set, burst into the light:

"'Tain't him, Tiny! 'Tain't *him!*"

Now this Tiny might, in another instant, have had reason to claim that the shout distracted him, did he care to lay upon an excuse. But even before the words were past the lips that yelped them, John found the opening he had been fighting for, the mark he had been driving at.

Full on the point of Tiny's chin his knuckles struck and the man's great legs sagged. The force of the blow rocked him backward and he crumpled quickly. His head, lolling to one side, crunched oddly as it struck the wheel of a baggage truck.

John heard that sound and a queer tingle ran through him. He lurched on forward, crouching as if to pounce upon his fallen adversary. Well enough to knock the big devil out, but he did not like that crunch! Hands clutched at his shoulder and a hoarse protest was in his ear.

"Get away!" John cried, shaking off the hands, heedless of the words, and dropped to his knees in the snow beside the fallen man.

"Hit his head!" some one cried as they gathered closely about, a weir of legs damming back the light from the doorway.

"Get back!" John snapped. "Out of the light, you!"

The voice of authority, that; of one bred and born and reared to give orders; snap and grit in the tone. And it cut through a rising mutter of grave ill feeling from the crowd, forced a falling back to let yellow light filter on the prostrate Tiny.

The man's face was bruised and bleeding. He lay lax and when John raised one of the great arms it dropped back limply. The man breathed heavily and apprehension mounted in the boy's consciousness.

"Get hold here!" he called sharply. "Carry him inside where I can see!"

And gently, easily, considering the man's weight, he slid an arm beneath the broad shoulders and raised the body.

Others helped, for the most part wordlessly, and they shuffled into the waiting room with their burden, placing it carefully on the floor beside the stove.

John was heedless of the crowd that pressed close again. He removed the thick cap from Tiny's head and with light, careful fingers rummaged through the stiff, crisp hair. He encountered no great bruise, no depression. The cap had been goodly protection; no fracture, perhaps not even—

Tiny stirred and moaned.

"Get me some snow!" John said, and two men scurried outside.

With his handkerchief he wiped blood from the man's chin and when the snow came he took a great handful and wiped the brow and temples carefully.

Tiny grimaced and puckered his lips and stirred. He moaned, opened one eye and whimpered.

"What th' hell—" he began, and the crowd stirred, as in relief.

John drew a deep breath and looked up at the faces above him; weather bitten, ruddy, vigorous faces, they were, and as his eyes swept them they turned on him with curious expressions.

"He wants to know what the hell," he began. "And that makes two of us. What the hell does it—"

HE BROKE short. He had settled back to sit on his heels, searching those faces with a demand for explanation when he saw her. She had stood behind him, looking down. Very small and slight of figure she was, and the face beneath the snug turban of beaver was as gentle as those others were rough. Her eyes were dark and large and serious; more than serious, perhaps; possibly deep trouble rode in them to go with the repressed line of her mouth.

She was looking full into his face and as he broke his gruff question he inclined

his head slightly as in recognition of a difference—and in apology.

He caught his breath.

"Sorry!" He nodded to her. "I should say—" whipping his glance to the men again—"what's a stranger to think of being ganged like this?"

One giggled, very briefly. No humor lay behind that query.

A slim, wiry man who had squatted on the other side of the reviving Tiny, spoke.

"We was expectin' another party, chum," he said. "You're a match for him in size, but you ain't the one we're lookin' for—this particular hard egg sent in to clean us out by old Tom Belknap!"

John's head jerked in amazement. He leaned forward, brows drawn.

"What?" he demanded, a long drawn word, strained with surprise; perhaps with something like shock.

"I said we'd got news a certain party who's raised hell here was comin' in to put a chunk under a corner. We aimed to get him back to Kampfest with bad news for old Belknap. Bein' excited like we was, and bein' dark like it was, we mistook you for him. Not important, mebbe, but true!"

John took a quick breath and let it out through his nostrils in an amazed blast.

"Well, I'll be—"

He looked up again for the girl's face, as though an exchange of glances with her might clarify this bewildering situation. She was gone. He stared at the others, but they were watching Tiny, who was being helped to a sitting posture by the smaller man.

"All right, Tiny?" the other asked.

The big fellow felt his chin gingerly, and his head, and then shook it as if to chase off the fog which impaired his faculties.

" 'D he git away?" he asked.

A chuckle from the crowd, then.

"Away, your grandma! There he sets, Tiny!"

The dazed eyes followed the gesture and he blinked slowly.

"God, Waybill, 'tain't him!" he said weakly.

"No, 'tain't."

"But this one—he's a stem winder!"

"Anyhow, that."

"And if this one *was* him—"

"Then we'd have a lot more to worry about. Yes, sir, if old Belknap could hire 'em like you, chum—" to John— "then the company would have somethin' to lay awake nights about!"

Tiny had been staring at John and now his gaze wavered as a man's will when he is overcome with embarrassment.

". . . get up," he mumbled, and John helped him to his feet.

The boy's heart was pounding. Old Tom, starting that sort of trouble?

"All right, Tiny?" Waybill asked, and when assured that the late unconscious man was getting to be as good as new, he turned to John.

"Guess it's due you to explain a little," he said, and John caught some vague change in the attitude of the group. The shuffling of feet, the murmurs, the looks spoke of a growing chagrin and embarrassment such as had marked Tiny's faltering gaze. "Stranger in this country?"

"Yes."

"Mebbe you've heard of old Tom Belknap?"

"I have—once." Some of his wrath surged up to mingle with high curiosity.

"Well, he's evident aimin' to run the Richards Company, here, off the earth. He's done a plenty, but the last thing he thought up was to bring a hand named Baxter to Kampfest." John, frowning, followed the man's matter-of-fact words closely. He spoke as one sure of himself; even as one reciting common knowledge. "This Baxter's a tough customer. He mixed it with our woods boss last week, tossed him off a car'n' broke his hip. Tonight he was advertised to come over here'n' clean out the town single handed. Makes us pretty hot, bein' that old Belknap only wants to close us down so's he can buy somethin' for little or nothin'. We done what, likely, you'd do for the outfit that hired you'n' you knew was fair'n' square'n' in a jackpot. Only we made a error."

A grim little man he was, but he had spoken with a fine spirit of loyalty. He now added:

"I'm sorry. Tiny, here, sure ought to be awful sorry, and I guess everybody else feels like we do. I hope, chum, the feelin's ain't too hard."

They stilled as a group will when an answer to an important question is due.

"Why, no. I see how it is," John said blankly.

Mistaken for his father's hired bully! And old Tom trying to run this other company into a corner? Old Tom, mixing it as, perhaps, an even older Belknap had done in the pine days? Was that a possible explanation of why he—young John—had been so carefully kept away from Kampfest? Were things transpiring in this country of which his father was ashamed?

Thoughts, guesses, emotions swirled in him. Whatever it was, this Richards outfit evidently was in a bad way, with its men worked up to such a point. Why, if these things were true . . .

Like a white hot thread the thought seared through his consciousness. If a fight were on here, waged by his father against a weaker competitor, might that not offer a greater vent, a more complete relief for his swelling resentment than bashing strangers with his fists? Until this moment his only possible vengeance on his father had been to run away, but now . . .

A man came in from outside, shouldering through the press, beating snow from a Scotch cap with his mitten.

"Here," he said, holding it toward John. "Here's your cap. I—I guess I knocked it off and— Well, you see how it was."

He was flushed and so evidently contrite that John smiled, and when he smiled the tension that had been on those men relaxed. The presentation of that cap was equivalent to a treaty gift, a token to heal a breach, a pledge and seal of friendship.

"Anything we can do for you, now—after tryin' our best licks to do things *to* you?" Waybill asked.

"Why, I guess not. Thanks a lot." John was finding his poise, stilling the hot curiosity that might lead him into blunders, making up his mind to learn this whole story but to do it adroitly, at the proper time. "If somebody'll point out the hotel, now—"

CHAPTER IV

PAUL GORBEL

IT WAS past the supper hour in Shoestring's one public stopping place, Rex Joslin's Palace Hotel.

But Rex was neither inhospitable nor unmindful of the dimes. No more was he an uncommunicative host. So he himself spread cold but satisfactory viands on one end of a long table and sat there, elbows on the oilcloth, while his slightly marred but obviously outstanding guest ate, and responded well to the questions that John Steele Belknap, identity as yet unknown in Shoestring, put to him.

The boy ate slowly, gaze much of the time on Jasper's face as the man talked and talked and talked.

"It just goes to show," Jasper said, narrowing his watery blue eyes, "what the concentration of great wealth into the hands of unscrupulous men will cause. Now, did you ever read the 'History Of Great American Fortunes'?"

"No," said John impatiently. "But are you sure that this man Belknap is behind all the trouble?"

"Sure!" The little man bristled with assurance. "Wasn't it a Vanderbilt that said that the thing a man wanted more than anything else was more? That's the way with this old Belknap. Predatory, he is; of the predatory wealthy! He's got the Richards Company in a corner and he ain't goin' to let it out. Why, even his own partner, Gorbel, over here at Kampfest, can't stop him. Gorbel ain't so bad, but Belknap gives the orders. You can't blame Gorbel. If a man's goin' to exist economically under a capitalist system he's got to go with the capitalists, ain't he? Now, if you've ever read '*Das Kapital*' by Karl Marx you'll see—"

John shoved back his plate and tapped the table with his fork.

"Just a minute. Let's see if I've got this story right. The logging railroad, owned by the Richards Lumber Company, goes through B. & G. timber. The right of way was granted by a man named Kampfest who used to own that timber. B. & G. bought him out and began to operate. Under the terms of the old contract they can either force the Richards Company to haul their logs out to a main line branch or order them to pull their steel. And, because of this squeeze, the Belknap camps are making logs in such quantities that the mill here can't be safely logged. That it?"

"That's right. This old Belknap ain't satisfied to have a soft thing, he ain't. This mill's been gettin' by some way, God knows how, 'nd soon's he sees that he starts gettin' rough, just like any old feudal baron 'd got rough. He has his hired help put Royce, the Richards woods boss, out of commission, which is awful bad. You can't log without a good boss and no man in his right mind's going to tackle a job where, on top of having to scratch to make a showin', he's in danger of getting his block knocked off any minute.

"Why, this old Belknap thinks he's a superman or something. I guess he's been reading Nietzsche. Did you ever read 'Beyond Good And Evil'? No? Well, now—" wriggling closer to the table—"there's what I'd call a downright dangerous philosophy. You see . . ."

But John Belknap, leaning back in his chair, now, gave no heed to Landlord Jasper's interpretation of philosophical theory. Things were singing in his veins, along with resentment; new, strange, stirring things.

When temper is up, one will believe anything of him who has roused it; past experience goes into the discard. It is so with individuals and with groups. War breaks and the people who yesterday were considered home lovers, clear thinkers, become insane, sadistic fiends. Injustice appears to have been done and he who yesterday was your friend, to whose defense you would have sprung in any matter, trivial or momentous, becomes one of whom nothing good can be said or thought. After what his father had done to him yesterday, young John was ready to believe anything. He had known of wars waged by old Tom against competitors; he had always thought them waged on fair terms.

But here was a conflict apparently unfair, unwarranted. Shoestring, to a man, evidently attested to its ruthlessness, and John's temper drove him headlong into an acceptance of that belief. Headlong and gladly. As good as a blow in the mouth, this! He had been kept away from Kampfest after heading toward it these years. Why? What reason? Because old Tom did not want him to know what was going on? Because he knew that John would have demanded an about-face?

The idea conceived down yonder in the depot was being born without pain, with a savagely glorious lift of anticipation. He had asked for responsibility and been put back into the class from which he had demonstrated his fitness for graduation; asked for bread and been given a stone. Well, how would his father like it if he refused to take what was offered? If, more than that, he stepped in and allied himself with an opposition because it gave him a chance to see what he was wound on? And with their backs to the wall, this Richards outfit, whoever and whatever it might be, needed a leader, fresh blood, some one who was not afraid of this giant, Tom Belknap.

". . . and when such philosophy gets into the minds of men like this predatory old devil it—"

"Where's the Richards' office?" John interrupted, rising.

Jasper blinked his watery eyes again.

"Why, it's acrost from the mill," he said, shuffling to a window and peering out through the slit of unfrosted glass near the top of the pane. "Yes, the's a light there now. Generally is, nights—this winter."

SNOW had ceased falling. The wind had dropped and the planks of wooden sidewalks, deep under hard packed snow, snapped and boomed as John traversed the shadows of lumber piles toward the looming hulk of a saw mill and the lighted, one-story building across the way which had been pointed out to him.

He had no definite plan. He had considered telling the manager the whole truth and asking for a job. That, however, might not be advisable; depended entirely on the type of individual he encountered. It would be a tough job to convince some men that they should hire for a responsible post the son of an arch enemy! But, whomever he found, he would at least learn more of what his father was up to. Of that only was he certain as he took the office steps at a jump and opened the door.

The building was divided into halves by a cold hallway. A single incandescent, dusty and weak with service, was set in the ceiling. Its light was not good, but a room to the left had better illumination and on the glazed glass of the door was painted the word "manager."

John stamped snow from his feet on a husk rug, but as he started for this evidently occupied office the sound of a voice arrested him.

A man was talking swiftly, softly, a bit tensely, and John stopped, not wanting to intrude at an inopportune time but impatient at the prospect of delay.

The voice went on:

"And my offer stands. I'm helpless to help the Richards Company in any other way, but I will buy, at that price, the entire property, timber, railroad and mill.

"Perhaps that offer seems small, but look what is going to happen if you try to keep on alone. I'm a partner with Tom Belknap, yes, but I'm powerless to shape the policy or direct the practise of that partnership. I'd give every dollar I have, Ellen, to see you, personally, at peace, but you will have no peace until Belknap has his way. He is out to buy this company at a figure even lower than I offer, and he finishes what he starts. Now, what do you say?"

John's heart raced as he stood there listening. The man in that other room was Paul Gorbel. He was making threats in Tom Belknap's name—bullying a woman for old Tom!

The woman spoke:

"I have only one thing to say, Paul. The Richards properties aren't for sale at any such absurd price; they aren't for sale at any figure under such pressure. They're in a tight place, well enough; they would have plenty to contend with in a fair fight, but you may take word back to your Mr. Belknap that the Richards Company is going to keep on fighting, that it's not going to whimper; that if it finally goes down, after doing all it can do to survive, it will be with the flag flying and the band saw singing!

"Take that word to your renegade partner, Paul, and don't come here again with one hand extended in friendship and the other carrying a club!"

Her voice, gentle in the beginning, had mounted to a determined cry and her hard flung defiance sent a prickling sensation to John's very fingertips. Some loyal employee—a bookkeeper, an office woman; a wife or daughter or sister of the Richards involved—had set Gorbel down with a jolt.

Behind that closed door, a low, sorry laugh and the sound of slow footsteps. A shadow crossed the lighted glass and Gorbel spoke again.

"Ellen! Ellen, *dear!* Don't you see that behind this is only one thing for me? Can't you understand that I'm risking all I've got in just trying to help you in small ways? It's you I want. It's you who's gotten into my blood! It's the waiting that kills me. I can't wait, I tell you! I can't—"

"Get back! Get away! Don't you dare touch me!"

He called her name again, almost savagely. Feet scraped on the floor; a sharp cry as with a crash the light in the office went out and the glass in the door showed a blank for John Belknap.

"Paul! Get out of this office, I tell you! Get away—away!"

Panic was in the tone; and for the man waiting outside there was but one move to make.

The faint light from the hallway, impaired by his own shadow as he poised there, hand still on the knob, revealed them.

A desk lamp lay on the floor at the man's feet and he was turning, relinquishing his hold on the girl's wrist, looking over his shoulder with a white, drawn face. He posed so a moment, staring at this intruder who showed only in silhouette.

"Well?"

Young Belknap did not move, did not reply for a moment. Then he said almost casually:

"I happened to overhear you being told to get out. I opened the door for you."

Gorbel whirled to face him, feet spread, arms held with stiff truculence at his sides.

"And who are you?"—bright eyes searching, striving to identify the shadowed face.

"The chap who opened the door."

"Well, close it, then, and 'tend to your own affairs!"

John shook his head.

"No," he said. "Not until the—the lady asks me to."

He could see her standing in the deeper shadows where she had swiftly retreated on his appearance. She was backed against a filing case as though in need of support. He added:

"I don't hear her asking me to get out. She did tell you to!"

Gorbel's hands were knotting into fists.

"You damned eavesdropper!" he muttered. "You—"

HIS WORDS and his defiance combined to make another sort of sting for John. Blood roared in his ears. He took the few quick strides that put him face to face with Gorbel, so close to him that he could hear the man's quick breathing.

"No names!" he muttered. "No names—or any other talk. Are you going out on your own legs?"

Gorbel swayed backward. His right hand swept the desk top and with a low growl John had the arm in one hand, pinned his other to Gorbel's side, twisted the man about and wrenched upward on the wrist until Gorbel doubled over with a cry.

"Drop it!"

"The devil with—"

"Drop it, I told you!"

Fingers opened and Gorbel moaned as added pressure came on his arm and a heavy paperweight thudded to the floor.

"Now—get out!"

Still retaining his grip that had the man's hand between his shoulder blades, the pain of which raised him to his toes as he walked, John propelled Gorbel swiftly out of the office, into the hallway, toward the entry.

"You damned butter-in!" he croaked thickly.

"Maybe," John said quietly, alert now to keep the man's face away from him.

He did not want Paul Gorbel to know that he was in Shoestring; did not want his father's partner to know yet that he had, even for a brief moment, taken up the cause of the one they were oppressing.

Gorbel struggled, but the lock on his wrist was secure. He bent forward for relief as John opened the door. The cold night surged in on them and then the one was running down the steps to regain the balance that the other's shove had imperiled.

At the bottom he whirled and lifted his face, normally handsome, now wrenched with rage.

"You pup!" he cried. "You'll pay for this!"

"Collect, then! But you stay away from here until you're sent for! Get that?"

He closed the door and turned back to the office, removing his cap as he went.

Brighter lights now burned, for a cluster in the ceiling had been switched on. The girl sat at a littered desk in the middle of the room, pale, shoulders hunched, head

bowed. He stopped in surprise. She was the girl he had seen in the station waiting room. With her coat and hat removed, in the neat jersey dress which exposed a graceful column of throat, she was as out of place in this office with its battered desks and dingy walls as a flower in a woodyard.

But to a young man racked with anger, whose whole consciousness is centered on finding a way to appease that dark emotion, who is driven in that search by the impatience of youth, such an item as feminine beauty has no appeal in such a moment. He was in that office with definite purpose; a girl, even a lovely girl, could not shift his mind from his errand. His surprise, which caused him to halt, was confined wholly to the lower levels of his mind.

She did not look at him; her eyes were averted as though the meeting of another gaze would break down her small margin of self-control.

John spoke:

"He called me an eavesdropper. I guess, in a way, he was right."

"Fortunately you heard," she murmured and then looked up. She started. "Oh! I didn't know it was you!" She brushed at her soft, short hair nervously and managed a sort of smile. "I—I wanted to tell you how—how sorry I am that the boys did what they did. Won't you come in?"

She rose and he could see that she was rallying her composure rapidly.

"Feel like an intruder," he said, advancing. "I came over here on the chance that I might find the manager, and ran into the late unpleasantness."

"I am the manager," she said simply.

And now surprise had him wholly; so completely that he blinked and laughed outright.

"What! You—why, a girl in this mess?"

She flushed deeply.

"I guess that's what it is—a mess. Even strangers know. I am Ellen Richards. This was my father's company. I've been trying to carry on for over a year, now, since he—since he died." Her eyes clouded.

"Oh," he said dully.

It simplified matters for a chap in an embarrassing position. A man, even in a pinch, might want to fight through to the finish on his own resources. A girl like this—the sort of girl you took to tea and the theater and to supper clubs; a nice girl who looked as though she read books and played golf and would complete the picture of a smart roadster—would be needing help. Lots of help! Immediately! It was her tough luck that she had incurred the attention of an old tyrant such as his father was turning out to be; his good luck that she was in trouble, filled with animus as he was for old Tom and aching as he was to show what he could do.

"It was terrible, the way the boys met you," the girl said. "There's no excuse for it, of course. It can be explained by the fact that they're so worked up over what had been going on and so loyal to my father's memory that they do these things regardless of my wishes. I'm—I'm so sorry! I feel responsible for it and for their hurting you."

He touched his cut lip.

"Don't mind me. As I understand the situation you seem to have troubles enough without worrying about a scratch on a stranger."

Her eyes dropped.

"And it was awfully generous of you to —to do what you did just now." Her voice trembled ever so little. "First, we hear that Tom Belknap's bully is coming here to harm more of my men and we beat you up in our excitement. Next, you walk in here to find Tom Belknap's partner demanding surrender and save me—embarrassment. There are some matters a girl can't handle, alone."

SHE WAS embarrassed on the last, but John did not heed that. When a man's mind is riveted to one purpose by a consuming rage, other details go by the board; and now he was concerned only with her tone

when she spoke the name that was his. Normally her voice was soft, gentle, well modulated, but when she spoke his father's name it was with a corroding bitterness.

John stirred uneasily. To tell a girl who could speak of a man with such contempt and animosity that he was that man's son was a bit more of an ordeal than he cared to undertake, considering his objective. He had found her in a man's job, in a man's fight, confronted with a man's problems, but she was no man; a girl with feminine reactions and prejudices, and to reveal his identity would terminate this talk abruptly. He would bet on that.

His heart went down, and then rebounded. Sandy's letter rested in his billfold. Good old Sandy, so rattled at writing a letter of character that he left out the once important, but now damning, third of his name.

He picked up her last words:

"Yes, a lot of matters a girl can't handle alone." But his steady gaze on her face was not one of sympathy or understanding.

He was sizing her up, studying her in the light of a possible vehicle for that impelling urge for vengeance.

"Throwing your caller out was simple. Maybe it won't be so easy to help you in other things. But that's what I came here for, to ask for a chance to try."

He tossed his cap to the desk top and unbuttoned his mackinaw with an air of one who has come to stay.

Her face changed oddly. The confusion and self-consciousness disappeared and across the depths of her dark, intelligent eyes flashed something that might have been a reflection of relief or caution, or conflict between these two. She sat very still, almost rigidly, as one will who confronts a great moment.

"Meaning just what?" she asked, with an odd bluntness for a girl.

"That I understand you're looking for a woods superintendent and I'd like to take on the chore."

"And that—that's what brought you to Shoestring?"

Surely it was a surge of relief, the sudden dawning of an unlooked for hope which unsteadied her tone.

"I've just finished one job," John said evasively. "I don't know how good I am; I'd like to find out. When I heard of the jam you're in here, I thought it might be a good place to see what I'm good for—what I'm wound on!" he finished with a touch of bitterness.

A moment of silence followed. He could see the pulses leaping in her throat and his own heart speeded a trifle. A girl in a corner should welcome such a chance, and he waited, anticipating that welcome, but it did not come. Instead of figuratively falling on his neck and hailing him as the saviour of the day she folded her small hands and looked at him with a gaze as searching as it was level.

"Perhaps you're asking for more than you understand—in the way of trouble, I mean. I need help and right away, but I wouldn't want any man to come to work for me without knowing just how desperate the situation is. That, you see, wouldn't be fair to—to the sort of man I need.

"People who have known this company for years figure that we are through. Even the men on the job have the notion that we're marked paid. Perhaps they are right; I'm trying to prove them wrong. I—it might be simpler if I knew just how much you have heard."

He told her tersely the gossip he had listened to in the past hour, and she nodded slowly.

"Those things are all true. There's a fundamental problem of finance, however, which is behind it all. The Bank of Kampfest, now owned by Belknap & Gorbel, holds enough of our paper to make our statement look very bad. We can hope for nothing but embarrassing demands there. The only way we can meet those obligations and keep from being sold out to satisfy them is to keep the mill sawing. I can borrow on lumber in the yard from Milwaukee banks, largely because we have some very favorable contracts. However, those contracts will be

voided unless we are prepared to meet their terms of regular and prompt deliveries.

"The way out, now, goes back to keeping the mill logged and running. Things haven't been any too smooth at the woods end; you know what we are up against in the matter of transportation, evidently. We can't spend a dollar for more equipment. We must keep afloat with what we have, or go down."

She paused and John had a queer feeling of annoyance at her apparent competence. A girl should not be so all-fired smart!

"Snow came early and we're going to have trouble with it. We have fourteen miles of railroad through choppings where drifting will be certain. I was worried tonight and went looking for Tiny and Waybill—my engineer and conductor—to have them take the plow out if it didn't let up. That's how I happened to see your reception. The snow has stopped; we're safe for tonight. How long we'll be safe, no one can tell. Without fighting snow we've been unable to build up a reserve of logs in the mill yard. A three-day shutdown would ruin us."

She paused again and her eyes shifted a moment from his intent scrutiny. She talked like a man, a business man, but that change in her face indicated to John that she was playing up to a part, downing her weaknesses and limitations with an effort which gave her a superficial veneer of coldness, hardness.

"No, things haven't been going so well in the woods. I kept Royce, my father's old superintendent, because I could trust him absolutely and I—I need men I can trust." The shell she had built about herself gave way ever so little for the moment.

"We were just getting along when Mr. Belknap himself came up to Kampfest." John's mouth tightened a bit and his brows gathered closer. "He seems to have arranged things very well. For a year Mr. Gorbel, his partner, has been asking me to put a price on the property. I have refused. After Mr. Belknap left, the process of forcing us out began. They overtaxed our railroad with their logs; then Mr. Belknap's hired thug put my superintendent out of the picture. The camp foreman, Mark Saunders, isn't up to the job. Two others who are good loggers won't come, now that the story has gotten around that Tom Belknap is after the Richards' hide. That is the situation," she ended abruptly. "That's what a superintendent will have to confront. Who are you to do it?"

He smiled, despite the unpleasant conviction that this Ellen Richards was going to be amazingly hard to deal with, and reached into a pocket for his billfold.

"A fellow doesn't like to polish his own medals." He laughed a bit nervously as he considered the thin ice on which he was treading. "I've only held one job that amounted to anything. I've had four years in forestry school, but the value of that remains to be proven, I suppose." He handed over Sandy's letter. "I don't know what you expect in the way of personal qualifications. I swear when it isn't always necessary; I smoke cigarets; I've been known to drink some. I don't know all that there is to know about hardwood logging by a long shot."

She was not reading the letter; watching him, instead, as though his words or manner intrigued her.

"I'd be interested in this job principally because it would—would show what I'm wound on and I'm curious to know how good or how bad I am. I've done my best to size up my own shortcomings; as for the rest, I'll leave it to Sandy McIver." He gestured toward the letter she held.

The girl's eyes dropped to the scrawl and her mouth twitched. It was coming, now, he felt. She was going to jump at the chance of getting help. He leaned forward a bit.

"That's a fine letter, Mr. Steele," she said. "Witch Hill—I don't know the company." She looked at him as if slightly puzzled and paused a moment. Then, decisively, "I'd like to have you go to camp with me tomorrow morning. After a few hours on the job I'll give you an answer."

She rose with a manner of dismissal and John Belknap, masquerading now as John Steele, got to his feet, annoyed and confounded.

"Fair enough," he said; it was all there was to say. "What time?"

"Seven, sharp, in the mill yard. Good night."

"Good night," he said, resentful of this further strain on his harried patience.

She was waiting for him to go and he started for the door. As he reached for the knob she spoke again—

"And once more, I thank you for—for what you did here."

"That was all right," he said. "I'd be glad to take on a row with a hand like Gorbel."

He did not heed the slight huskiness that had been in her voice, indication that thinking back to her encounter brought a recurrence of fright. He did not care what went on in the mind or the heart of Ellen Richards except for what she might think or feel of him as an applicant for a chance to show his father, indeed, what he was wound on.

CHAPTER V

THE RICHARDS' NEW SUPER

IT WAS a queer experience to spend a day with a girl who was sizing him up!

John was in the mill yard early, watching Ellen, clad in mackinaw and knickers and pacs, as she watched the loading of camp supplies. She was crisp, intent, business-like and greeted him almost curtly.

Tiny Temple reached down from the locomotive cab to shake his hand; Waybill took a moment to apologize again for the trouble of last night and John could see that both were watching him closely, probably wondering about his errand.

He strolled about; watched the mill saw; looked over equipment in the yard. With the train under way he sat alone in the "dog house" of the way car while Ellen remained below, talking earnestly with the conductor. Her words reached him occasionally and always they were of the country, savoring in phrase and inflection of the timber. She was a daughter of the camps, for certain; sprung from the same stock which gave him birth.

Out to the northward they toiled, up mile after mile of stiff grade and after seven miles they crossed the main line branch, with its water tank and tender's house. To the eastward along that steel was Kampfest and it was to this point that Ellen was forced to deliver the B. & G. logs from their landing, fifteen miles to the northward.

Beyond the crossing they rocked and clanked down long grades toward the distant timber, stopped at the B. & G. camps, spotted cars and then went on, another three miles, to Richards' Camp No. 16, woods headquarters.

Until the Belknap cars were spotted Ellen did not come near John. Then she climbed to the perch beside him and with a long breath settled back.

"Some bad cuts back there," he remarked.

"Yes. We'll have our troubles with snow any time now."

"Your locomotive leaks," John said, eyeing the clouds of steam ahead.

"Tiny, bless him, will work twenty hours a day to keep her going," the girl replied. "Perhaps it will die on us before spring, spite of him. If we had another I'd let Mr. Belknap whistle. We can't have another until we make more of a showing."

John nodded to himself. She was in a corner, all right. Well, if she would give him the chance he might let her out; at the least he would show old Tom a trick or two, or lose an eye trying.

"And now," Ellen said as they came to a squealing stop at her camp, "I've a lot to do. If you just follow me around . . ."

He just followed her around. He met men: Saunders, the foreman; Jack Tait, the barn boss; the cook, the scaler, the clerk, Jerry Tubbs, fat and asthmatic. He heard her talk to these men as he himself would have talked to men in his employ—directly, tersely, in their own lan-

guage. But now and again he heard items which indicated the sorry deficiencies in her experience for such a task as that confronting her. He kept his eyes as well as ears open; he asked questions of Ellen occasionally and of a man here and there; but all the time he was restive, up on the bit, growing hourly more provoked with a girl who needed him, but who would keep him waiting.

But in late afternoon, when she led the way into the office, deserted for the moment, she changed; she ceased to be the assured young business woman, filling a man's shoes more or less competently.

The crude office was silent and as John closed the door there penetrated from afar the scream of a whistle.

"So cold," she said, "the loads pull heavily. We can't take more than four cars at a time up those grades to the crossing. They've been doubling with B. & G. logs all day and we won't get half a day's cut to our mill tonight."

She dropped to a chair as though suddenly weakened and her mouth quivered. Small and fragile and lost she looked, with the last sunlight streaming through a window to shoot copper glints from her dark hair, freed from the snug cap, now, by a weary gesture; but John responded with no feeling of sympathy for her as an individual, no romantic impulse. She was weak, beaten. Out on her feet. She needed help and her need was his opportunity.

She looked up with a wry little smile and asked—

"Well, what do you think of it?"

"Haywire!" he exploded. "It's slow, costly—a joke! No wonder you're in trouble, with a woods job run like this one!"

The words tumbled out as words will when they have been withheld too long. His conviction was double ply. What he had seen had stirred pride in his own capacities; he knew he could speed the operation up. And the prospect of taking it in hand and stinging his father as he had been stung gave his eagerness a touch of fever.

"Well, what would you do?" she asked, trying to put some tone of challenge into the words and failing.

He told her what he would do and why, item by item; told it emphatically, almost as though she were disputing him; told it with a thoroughness which revealed his powers of observation and his agility of interpretation. He gesticulated; he let his voice rise in pitch and volume. He leaned forward, like a lawyer pleading a case. He seated himself on the edge of a chair and made rough diagrams on paper. He shot questions at the girl to which he expected no answer and then answered them himself. Sales talk, it was; driving, pounding, convincing sales talk.

She watched him, lips parting as his conviction carried him away.

He stopped, again standing before her, saying—

"Those are a few of the things I'd do until I dug up more to do." She looked away into the sunset, filtering through the naked tops of maple and birch and beech, and her eyes misted.

"I'm glad you're looking for a hard job, John Steele," she said calmly. "I think—I think I'm going to depend on you from now on."

He laughed as a man will who is coming out of a fright.

"I'll do my darndest," he said.

ELLEN RICHARDS' new woods boss went like the wind, like fire, like a wild horse; by day he drove his crews; by night he sat in the office at camp or in town and laid plans for further driving.

No wonder the reserve of logs in the mill yard was low. Even if Ellen had had no B. & G. logs to overtax her transport facilities the scale in the decks would have been deficient and the train crew, with only Richards' stuff to move, would have been idling away its time. Surprisingly few logs were ready in the woods.

The winter's operation had been confined to a long, narrow ravine into which, because of the contour of the country,

steel could not be laid at justified expense. The haul was along the bottom of this sharp depression to its lower end and thence up a hill, where a tow team worked every hour getting loads to the top. From there the sleighs doubled back on the high land, paralleling the first part of the haul to reach the landing.

Over three miles, it was, and at one point the steel came within forty rods of the rim of the ravine.

"We should be dumping right there," John exclaimed to Saunders when he saw the place.

"Yeah. But we don't haul by aeroplane yet," the foreman growled.

John said no more, but his mind was busy. In the mill yard was an old Rapid steam loader, discarded years before for the more efficient McGiffert. It was not in bad shape and three days later it was in the woods and men were building a road through the deepening snow straight up the side of that pot hole and on to the adjacent steel. The jammer was set down, skidded to the brink of the steep pitch and a cable bent to the drum. Teams left off the long journey by iced road, took their sleighs down the pitch to the skidways, brought them, loaded, to the foot of the incline, unhooked and came up ahead while the power of the Rapid's steam engine snaked the loads to the top.

The tow team was liberated for the haul; each sleigh was able to move an extra thousand a day; costs were cut. Daily the size of the decks at the new landing increased; log production was stepping up; a fundamental shortcoming was being overcome. And as he stood on the third afternoon following the initiation of his new plan, John muttered tightly—

"See what I'm wound on, Tom!"

Another saw gang went on; the blacksmith flew at the task of widening bunks; section men, working with slabs and cull lumber, built snow fences at strategic places along the right of way. The job took on new life. It was reaching out, looking far ahead; rushing in to meet problems rather than waiting for them to come up for solution.

"Look close, Tom!" John growled at the end of the tenth day. "See what I'm wound on yet?"

Yes, the Richards' operation had new life, new vigor so long as John had his fingers on each phase, but a man can not be in more than one place at a time; each day has only its allotted hours.

He had had the train crew with him from the beginning and did not need to worry about getting the best out of what equipment he had there. Tucker, the road master, was spry enough, eager enough, it seemed, but there were times when John felt that he could not wholly trust the man. Nothing he could put his finger on; no delinquency he could point out. Just intuitive distrust.

He won Jack Tait, the barn boss, as a stalwart friend by sitting up through one bitter night to help minister to a sick horse. The horse died, but its distress had not been the primary motive in going without sleep. He needed the staunch support of his men, as any executive needs the faith and loyalty of those at his command. No business will succeed unless divisional heads are behind the management heart and soul; the backbone of an army is its non-coms.

And in one important place John knew that his organization was weak.

Mark Saunders, the camp foreman, had undoubtedly looked forward to stepping up in the Richards organization. A grizzled, middle aged man, he had evidently regarded the opening caused by Royce's misfortune as an opportunity; a veteran of the camps, he resented working under a young stranger.

From the beginning John understood this but he also believed that with another to lay plans for him, Saunders could function nicely. He was capable, but disgruntled. He became suddenly loyal to Royce, whose plan of operation was being upset; he was disinclined to accept innovations with good grace. He sullenly argued for the retention of a jammer man who was not satisfactory. More, when work took John into Shoestring, he returned to find that the speed of the job

had fallen off because, instead of being with his men, Saunders would sit in the office and nurse his grievances.

John's first impulse was to send the man out, so hot and eager was he to make a showing, but he considered the fact that Saunders knew the job intimately; that many of the crew were cronies of his and probably shared his animosity for this new and clean sweeping broom. A discharge would mean worse feeling within the ranks and no good could come of that.

He tried to draw out the best in Saunders, but the man was adamant. He shut up like a clam when approached with argument; he would not respond to an appeal for help in this time of the company's need. In another week, John told himself, Saunders would either click or pack his *keister*. He was worried. Saunders had suddenly become a key man; the difficulty his attitude presented was threatening the readjustment in operation which must come. If he failed because he could not win the support of his men, what a thing that would be for old Tom to mull! His father was going to know all about this venture some day, win or lose. The situation was not pleasant to contemplate.

A chance to take on an order for veneer birch came in and John talked the matter over with his foreman.

"Lots of fuss for nothing." Saunders sniffed. "Snow's getting too deep. A puttering job, and how could we move 'em to town if we did get 'em to steel?"

"Let me figure that out. The price is high; there's a chance for profit and if we can make it I don't want to pass it up. I'd like to look at the stuff, anyhow."

SO, on an afternoon when the temperature hovered around zero, John and Saunders snowshoed away from the job through the silent forest to a section where the cruise indicated that birch stood in unusual quantities. John tried to make talk, but his companion would not respond, and little was said until they crossed a pole bridge that spanned the Mad Woman.

"Ice thick enough to haul on," Saunders observed.

"Except on the riffles."

"They'll be tight by now."

"Not so sure. What do you call this below? High Banks? I saw it last week and it was open in the current. Ice won't be safe yet in water that swift."

"Well, you're boss. You ought to know everything."

John concentrated on holding his temper. The man was childish.

An hour later they stopped to check their tallies.

"You're right on this piece, Saunders," John admitted. "The stuff simply isn't here in big enough quantities. But down below it may be."

"Well, you know the corners, now; the only way for you to be sure is to look. My word's no good."

"Snap out of it, Mark! Lord love you, I've got to be shown, haven't I, or let somebody else run this job?"

The other shrugged.

"Go see, then. I've got to get back unless you tell me different."

"No; I'll do it alone."

Abruptly the foreman turned away. He did not take their back track, but struck to the southward directly for camp.

"Careful of that ice, if you're going across the river!" John called. "It's pretty young."

"It's my skin that'll get wet if I'm wrong," the man growled doggedly.

It was hard to laugh off an attitude like that and John frowned as he pulled out pipe and tobacco.

Saunders walked rapidly through the timber toward the river, muttering to himself now and again. He dropped from the hardwood to a ribbon of cedar swamp, wallowed through to a poplar flat above the stream where beaver had worked, and came out on the bank of the Mad Woman.

Twenty feet from either side old ice, thickly coated with snow, showed. Over the channel, however, and in against the

far bank at which the stream had been eating for generations, the wind had in places cleared the surface of the new black veneer that low temperature had created. It was only a night or two old, and Saunders paused a moment indecisively. Had he not been warned, he would go upstream to the bridge; but this Steele knew too much!

Saunders went briskly out on to the frozen surface, webs biting the wind packed snow. As he stepped from the old ice to the young, he went a bit gingerly, breathing through parted lips and with his hands spread for better balance. The footing was slippery.

Young ice; and strong ice, considering its thickness; flexible ice, too. It began to bend and, seeing, Saunders went faster, sliding along, skating on his shoes rather than walking. He turned in a moment to see a dark stain of water following him.

With a low ejaculation he began to move in a shuffling run. Three strides he took, putting him beyond the center of the stream, putting him within thirty feet of the old ice ahead. Three strides, and on the fourth his foot went through.

He sprawled forward, half on purpose, trying to distribute his weight more widely, but he fell heavily on his hip, smashing through, feeling his feet drop into the current.

Into the current, with the snowshoes dragging his feet under! Into the current, with ice breaking beneath his arms as he fought against the pull on his legs. Into the deep, savage, sucking river, fighting desperately for a hold on safety.

He thrust his arms far forward, leaned his head low to the ice edge and clung. For a moment it held him up and he raised his voice in a shrill, clear whoop; another and a third. He wriggled for a firmer hold and the sleeves of his coat resisted the pull. They were frozen to the ice, giving him security against slipping backward for the moment, but he raised his head and yelled again, frantically, because his feet were stretching far forward, his hips yielding to the drag of the Mad Woman and sliding under.

Back in the timber John heard the first of those cries come ringing and reverberating through the afternoon silence. The sounds seemed to come from all directions, echoing down the ravines, among the stalwart tree trunks. He stopped, cocking his head. Again the cry, and again.

No warning shout of a teamster, that; he was too far from the job. No one else was near him except Saunders and, knowing that, the peculiar qualities of the hail snapped into evidence. Distress—a call for help!

John ran in long, strong strides, lifting his feet high in the soft snow, head turned for other sounds. They came, in rapid succession—the panicky cries of a frightened man, now growing a bit hoarse.

John did not know that he could run that fast on snowshoes. He went down an incline and floundered up a rise at top speed, driving his heart and legs to maintain the pace. He came on Saunders' trail and that made the going easier, but he fell after a moment, tripping on a buried top. He was up in an instant, redoubling his efforts to make up for lost seconds.

Down a slope, through hemlocks, into a barrier of thick cedars where Saunders had wallowed and where he wallowed now. The cries were closer but not so loud; seemed muffled, strangled.

John was now through the cedar, out into the beaver gutted poplar, and could see.

Saunders was there, down to his breast in the water, arms stretched on the ice before him, backward tilt of head and neck indicating that his feet were close under the ice, stretched out there by the pull of the current.

"Steele!" the man was calling. "Steele! For God's sake, Steele!"

"Coming!" John yelled.

But he was not coming; he was wrenching at a lodged poplar beaver that had started to fall. It was three inches through at the butt, straight and tall, the cut not wholly completed and the top lodged in the tops of companion trees.

HE WRENCHED and heaved at the thing, cursing its hold. It came free at the butt and he dragged the top down, knocking off the branches, brittle with frost, not yet brittle with decay. And as he worked he watched Saunders, gaged the ice and the distance.

He was heavier than the foreman by thirty pounds, so he had no chance of making it out there without crashing through. On the old ice he stooped and unbuckled the straps about his ankles and leaving his toes in the harness he shuffled forward, out from safety, out on to the new ice, feeling it sag beneath him and hearing its protesting creak.

He ran in short, shuffling strides, carrying the tree as a rope walker carries his pole. He held his eyes on the man yonder whose face, in a fixity of suspense, was turned toward him. He could see the cords of Saunders' neck standing out as the foreman fought the drag on his feet and held his frozen sleeves rigid, the last hold on life.

Ice gave beneath John and he lunged forward, still on top. He saw a section of ice under Saunders give. Water swept about one of Saunders' arms and the sleeve let go. The man flung it high and clawed frantically, making strange sounds.

And then John was out of his shoes, letting his body fall forward, taking one quick stride as he went down, smashing the ice for his full length, sousing into that bitterly cold water, holding the saving pole tight to his breast, its ends on the unbroken ice on either side. He kicked himself, shoved himself forward, moving the pole out to arm's length, drawing himself up to it; repeating the maneuver, calling out to the other to hang on another second.

"Just another second!" he yelled and feared that his words had double meaning, that only such a brief space of time was left to the man yonder.

But the other, mind numbed by the strength sapping chill, construed the call as something else. He thought that John meant it would take him only a second to get to his side and he babbled against the delay.

Lunge forward, draw yourself up, smash more ice ahead, shove the pole out, pull yourself up to it; smash again . . .

Inches at a time; two yards away now; a yard—almost within reach. And the water spread. The ice under the foreman gave. With a cry Saunders was turned about as the current sucked hungrily, and John just caught the sodden mitten as it swept past on its way to destruction.

"Got you!" he panted. "Got you, Saunders! Easy, now!"

He dragged the man to him. John's teeth chattered with cold. Saunders was beyond that sort of reaction. He was moaning and could scarcely move.

Face to face across the pole they clung for a moment.

"Not too much weight on it. Steady, now. Too much and we'll both go under."

He let himself go and worked Saunders down against unbroken ice, hitching the pole along, making it support them.

"Get your elbow on the edge, there. Easy, now! Not too much!"

He was to his armpits in the water himself and tried to shove Saunders, whose chin was in the current, higher.

"Can't!" the man moaned. "The snowshoes—can't . . ."

"Work your foot up to me, if you can—Hey! Hear me?" The glaze coming over the other's eyes frightened him. "Your foot! We've got to get those damned rackets off!"

He began groping with his own feet for Saunders' legs. He locked a hand in the man's coat across the pole and with the other found his knife, deep in a pocket. He opened the blade with his teeth and held it in his mouth as he drew that helpless leg toward him.

He worked it up to the surface, somehow, holding the man to the pole, one shoulder crowded against the ice edge. Saunders protested that the lifting of his foot would drag his head under but John managed to save him that. The snowshoe came out of water. On the first slash the strap parted and John tossed it to the ice.

More trouble with the other foot.

"Drown me—you'll drown me . . ."

"Drown both of us if we can't get—"

John grunted as he pulled the other unwieldy foot upward. He slashed once and the knife turned in his numbing hand; again, and he cut the pac; a third time, and the strap fell in two.

He let the knife drop and clamped his teeth against the seeping weakness. He was cold, terribly cold. It seemed as though his bones were brittle with frost, as if the ice of the river had worked into the very valves of his heart. A singing, mounting in pitch, came into his ears. For a moment he felt very tired, so tired that he must stop and rest. Rest, there—with this man asleep beside him?

He slapped the face. He tried to strike it with his fist. His movements were slow and without strength.

"Stay by it, Mark! Another minute, now. Get your belly on that web. Up you go, now!"

SHOVING with his free hand, lifting with a knee, ordering, imploring, cursing; seeing the ice break again and again to thwart him, he finally managed to get the other out from his hips up, sprawled across the snowshoe on the ice.

"Get the other shoe, now! Oh, ahead of you! Reach! Reach for it, man! It's life itself! Reach—other way! The other way!"

It took minutes for Saunders to work his weight to those saving webs and he lay for what seemed hours, clothing going gray as the air made a coating of ice from the water in the fabric. He would not respond until John reached over and, from his position in the water, struck him in the mouth again. Then he rolled over and clawed to tear a snowshoe free and shove it ahead and hunch himself to it.

"Good lad! Made a yard! Do it again, now! Do it again!"

John caught himself talking wildly after that; hitching along beside his foreman, still in the water himself, not yet daring to leave the other's side, knowing the ice would not hold them both.

He got along somehow; and he badgered and coaxed and shamed the other along. Old ice was only feet away; a yard away. His pole was holding. It was slippery with ice.

He laughed and found himself standing on the queerest legs he had ever owned, dragging Saunders to safety, slapping him, swearing close in his ear.

"You weak sister!" he taunted. "Stand up like a man! You, a camp foreman, letting a little cold—"

No use. John left the man there. A person who has been through an ordeal like that has only so much strength left, and there's another job to do. Water or cold; either will kill. John had reeled and almost fallen and now he was staggering toward the bank, eyes strained wide as their gaze held on a birch tree, an ancient birch tree there above him with feathers of bark dangling from its trunk, with a frost crack showing a great flake of bark ready to be torn off.

He gathered the stuff with infinite care; with stutterings coming from his throat. His fingers would not function and so he put his palms together and clamped them on a shred of bark, tore it off, sometimes after many attempts; he dropped those treasures, one by one, into his cap which lay on the snow.

A cap full, now; overflowing, after what seemed hours of toil. Twigs next, harvested at the cost of tremendous, clumsy effort until a sheaf of them lay at his feet.

Somehow he got into his pocket again and drew the waterproof match safe out. It fell into the snow and, on his knees, he pawed for it, flakes of ice falling from his clothing as he bent his stiffening frame. He could not clamp a hand on the cap; the damned hand would not bend, would not go where he willed it to go. He finally shut his teeth on the cap, and unscrewed it.

Steady, now! This had taken a long time and Saunders lay there on the edge of the ice, in the edge of the drift, face down; he had not moved for long. Steady, now!

Don't drop the matches. He scratched one and it broke without igniting. The next sputtered and leaped to flame and slipped away. Then the flame burned clear in the motionless air.

He sank to his knees with a moan of relief and shoved the tiny pennant of fire down into the curls of birch bark which packed and overflowed his cap. An orange tongue leaped upward, fringed with quivering black smoke. Lovely sight! Exquisite sight! Carefully he laid the twigs over the fire. He smelled smoke and heat, breathed it in through open lips as he crouched.

It took him so long to get up to that hemlock stub; he wallowed in snow to his thighs, to his hips. He beat the loosened bark with his open hands and it fell away. He toiled back with a precious armful, came again, tore off larger chunks, one slab as big as the back of his jacket. It smoked, it threw out heat.

How he got Saunders up to the fire he never knew. He recalled fighting his way back to the hemlock again, swearing thinly as he knocked and tore off more bark, and when he toiled down to the fire again Saunders was there, up on one elbow, trying to wriggle closer to the growing blaze.

The fire melted a well for itself in the snow; a well, and then a cavern as more fuel was heaped on. It hissed and snapped and sang and when the cedar boughs, stuck into the snow behind it to make a reflector, threw more of its heat at them, the flakes of ice on their clothing changed to beads of water.

Blue with cold, shivering, moaning now and then, they stood naked before that great pyre at last, wringing out their garments, waving them through the smoke. Sweet smell, that of drying wool.

It was not until he was half dressed that Saunders spoke. He did not look at John. He stood hunched, buttoning his drawers about his waist.

"Much obliged," he said and cleared his throat sharply.

"That's all right, Mark," John replied.

But that night, after the cook's range had finally driven the chill of the Mad Woman from his blood, Mark Saunders stopped in the men's camp on his way from cook shanty to office. The place was blue with pipe smoke, thick with heat from the good beech and maple that crammed the heater. Men on the deacon bench and men in their bunks relaxed mightily in this hour before turning into blankets.

Talk dwindled off as the foreman closed the door and walked into the center of the room, halting there. He had an air about him as he stood beneath the hanging lamp and looked about. The stove breathed steadily, fuel in it snapped smartly.

"Listen here, you," he said gruffly. "Things ain't been right, off and on, around this job. I'm one that's to blame; mebbe the's others. I got just this to say! Steele's all wool and over a yard wide. Any man that ain't ready to work his back in two and his heart out had better drag it before daylight."

He looked about again and nodded once, grimly.

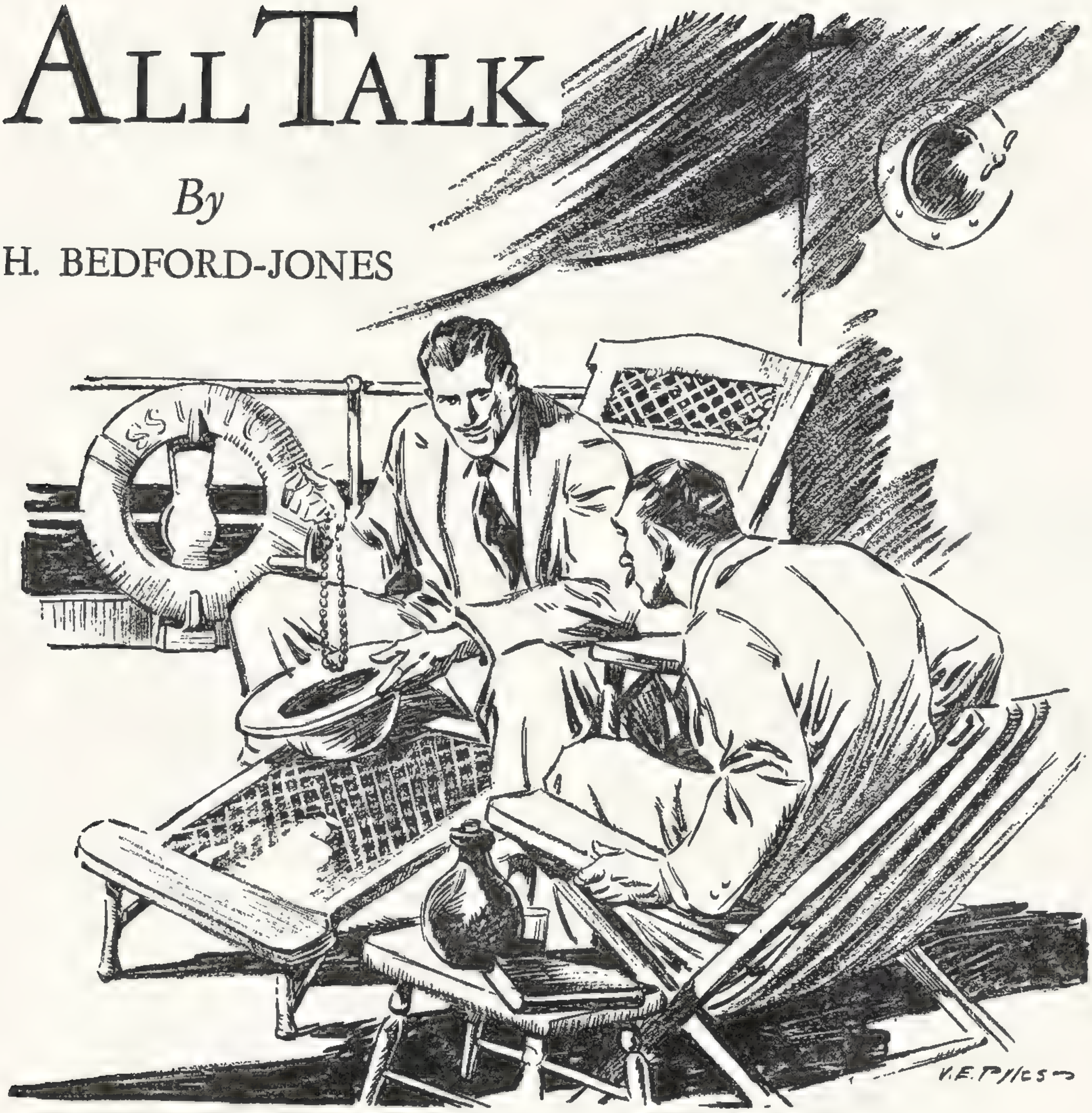
"That's all," he said and walked out, slowly, deliberately, as he had come.

TO BE CONTINUED

ALL TALK

By

H. BEDFORD-JONES



A Story of French Indo-China

KENNEDY was a mystery, as he stood there in the Messageries office in Saigon, pocketing his ticket for Singapore; but his papers were correct and he was so evidently a man of the right sort that the polite Frenchman behind the counter took a chance.

"Messieurs, you will both be on the same boat; you are both alone—may I assume the honor of making you acquainted? Monsieur Kennedy—Monsieur Dudevant."

The two men bowed, shook hands and adjourned to a table at the Café de Paris for drinks.

Kennedy scrutinized the Frenchman quietly. He himself was brown, level eyed, tight of lip and thin of nostril; a man of forty-five, to judge by graying hair and lined features. Lines or not, the innate strength of those features made

women look twice. Even when he smiled, Kennedy's face preserved a certain gravity, a hard and inflexible purpose. Yet he was extremely likable.

Dudevant was gay, carefree, handsomely dressed. His face was lean and sallow, with a long waxed mustache, gray hair at his temples, and alertly eager eyes, ever bright and dancing. For the past six years he had been upcountry, an official of the Compagnie d'Indo-Chine. Now he had resigned, was going home to Paris. He had made his pile.

Kennedy had been traveling about for a month past, seeing the country. He said no more, except that he was alone in the world; one inferred that, like many another tourist, he was seeking in travel to forget a loss. Of money, he had a great supply. He had been across the border in Siam and was now going to Singapore; after that, he did not know. Perhaps back home, he said with a shrug, perhaps on around the world. Life seemed rather a blank to Kennedy.

The Singapore boat would not be in for two days. Kennedy accepted Dudevant's offer to put him up at the club; they drifted about together, became better acquainted, liked each other. Beneath Dudevant's gay demeanor was a nervous hardness, a bitterness against the world; he told Kennedy many a tale of the hill-country, and they were cruel stories as a rule. Yet his bubbling vivacity, his eagerness for France, were good to see; he had enough money to see him through the rest of his life and he was joyously happy about it.

Dudevant spoke good English, liked Americans and made Kennedy at home in Saigon. He learned that Kennedy had been a banker—not surprising to one who noted the thin lips. By the second day the two men were good friends.

That afternoon, as they sat sipping *apéritifs* on the cool, tree shaded terrace of the Café de Paris, a young Frenchman went staggering past—a boy in the colonial infantry, fresh from St. Cyr and France. Kennedy watched him half cynically, half pityingly.

"Drunk, eh? Too bad," he commented. "First time I ever saw one of your officers in that shape."

Dudevant shrugged.

"Why not? The boy's homesick, touched with fever, lost in some hell hole upcountry; he tries opium, perhaps takes a native woman, comes to himself, believes his life and honor are smirched, tries to forget it in liquor—and *voilà!* A bullet through his brain some day. The young fellows, they are made that way, my friend."

"Not ours," said Kennedy. "Not Americans. And yet—"

"Oh, yes!" Dudevant laughed, with a wry and mirthless grimace. "Youth is alike the world over. I remember—that is to say, there was—"

He paused, his gaze following the lurching figure of the young officer. Then he smiled and looked at Kennedy.

"But perhaps it would be offensive, this story about an American?"

"Not a bit of it." Kennedy beckoned the waiter and laughed. "Why? I'm not taking offense where none is meant. You think you can prove your case?"

"That youth is the same the world over? Absolutely." Dudevant settled back in his chair and lighted a *jaune.* "There was a young American who came out to Bangkok—his name, I believe, was like an overcoat; oh, yes, Mackintosh. That was it."

Fingering the fine points of his mustache, his brilliant eyes fastened upon the passing figure of a charming golden skinned Eurasian girl, Dudevant sat half retrospective, half in dream. He did not observe the sudden sharp flush that leaped in the brown cheeks of Kennedy, to be gone next instant.

"You knew him, then?" asked Kennedy, his voice very negligent.

"I? Oh, no, not at all!" Aroused by the words, Dudevant laughed and turned. "No, but I have heard the tale from those who did. He came to Bangkok on some important mission for a teak lumber firm—a chance to open up his career. Three months later he was a wreck—and why?

One night did it. You know, they have some remarkable gambling places in Bangkok, yes? You have seen them, perhaps."

Kennedy nodded. He was fingering his glass, staring down at it, as though but half hearing the story. Puffing at his cigaret, Dudevant pursued the thread of his story.

"Mackintosh, it seems, got drunk one night, and gambled. He lost some enormous amount. He was hooked by some English or German chap from Canton, I think. He became very drunk. Well, that was all! A little thing, to you or me, a mere youthful trifle. True, he rather made an ass of himself and the American consul had to intervene; but in all, a trifle. To him, however, it was no trifle. He felt he had disgraced his whole life, himself and his family and so forth. So he, who until then had drunk seldom, plunged into gambling and liquor—perhaps attempting to retrieve the sums he had lost. Some woman, too, got hold of him."

Kennedy watched the liquid in his glass intently. A deep crease had appeared between his brows; his eyes, beneath their lowered lids, seemed to flame and glitter.

"This poor young man," pursued Dudevant, "had entirely ruined himself in another fortnight—entirely. He fought with two or three men, one the head of his company. He was fired from his position. He lost his own and the company's money. His affair with the lady became scandalous, even for Bangkok, which is no ways particular. You have been in Siam; you have seen the temples there, the Golden Wat and the others, with their enormous treasures? Well, this Mackintosh probably became utterly desperate. One night, having laid his plans, he got into one of the temples, killed one priest and hurt another, and got away with bulging pockets—jewels of all kinds. He disappeared."

Kennedy started to speak, checked himself, then asked an odd question.

"Was it known that he was the guilty party?"

"Oh, no! He was never suspected." Dudevant laughed a little, ironically. "Others were suspected; there was a great scandal. He disappeared; and because no white man disappears easily in Bangkok, he was thought to have jumped into the river—killed himself."

Kennedy looked sharply at the Frenchman, then lifted his glass and sipped at it.

"Odd," he commented.

"Was it not? That a foreigner, an American, should have pillaged one of those temples, which not the cleverest thieves in all Asia have been able to enter!" Dudevant's voice was admiring, his eyes were eager. "Weeks later, this young man turned up at one of our frontier posts, disguised as a native. He was in terrible condition—emaciated, wounded, starved; he died a day or two afterward. The official in charge buried him decently and kept his secret."

"Where was this?" asked Kennedy, an odd steely inquiry in his tone.

Dudevant shrugged and waved his cigaret lightly.

"Who knows? I heard some gossip; but one does not inquire too closely into the doings of a brother official. It was at one of the hill stations."

"And his loot? His jewels?"

"Ask of the jungle, of the natives, my friend; he had nothing left. You see how my case is proved? One little youthful folly, one evening gone wrong, and imagination led him on. He thought his life was ruined; so he went on and ruined it."

Kennedy nodded. He produced a cheroot, bit on it and his eyes gleamed.

"By gad, you've got to hand it to him! He got away with a man's job, eh? I've seen those temples and how they're guarded. Then he lost everything, staggered into French territory and died from his hardships. That it?"

"So." Dudevant smiled. "You see? And this young colonial officer who just passed—he drinks, he commits some trifling breach of discipline, he drinks more, and some day he is found with a bullet in his brain. All for nothing. Excuse me

a moment. I will telephone to the club about the wine for dinner."

He rose and strode inside, a tall, lean man who walked with lithe steps. Kennedy looked after him, face like iron, and took the cheroot from his lips.

"So!" he said, half aloud. The sound of the word was like an animal's snarl.

THE MESSAGERIES boat came in, took aboard its southbound freight and passengers and went back downstream in the curious way boats have of leaving Saigon.

Kennedy and Dudevant had obtained a cabin together. As though the safe departure and the free air of the sea had unsealed his lips, Kennedy almost at once became less taciturn, treated his companion to little confidences, displayed a new and very pleasing side of his nature. He, a hardboiled financier, had his weaknesses; and the trust of such a man is always flattering.

He told Dudevant, for example, just what he had been doing in Indo-China and upcountry. The Frenchman listened, at first astonished, then with thoughtful, reflective eyes fastened on the sea horizon to port.

"So you collect gems, eh?" said Dudevant slowly. "For those who can afford it, a pleasant pastime, and perhaps profitable. And you had no luck?"

Kennedy shook his head.

"Not a scratch; never found a stone. Wasted my time and money, not to mention my arrangement with a customs guard at Singapore. You see, that's how I could make it profitable. No duty to pay here, no duty to pay when I got home. Such things can be arranged if you locate the right men. I had hoped to take home at least fifty thousand pounds' worth of stones—and I haven't found a dozen decent ones the whole trip."

Dudevant commiserated with him, and presently changed the subject. That evening they sat in a bridge game with two Englishmen, and Kennedy lost quite heavily. He settled up from an amazing roll of fifty-pound Bank of England notes, and Dudevant's eyes lingered on this display of cash with gathering cupidity in their dark depths. Some men are like that; the sight of much money seems to waken latent greed within them.

It was on the following afternoon, as they sat together beneath the after bridge deck awning, that Dudevant turned to Kennedy and spoke with very sober air.

"The compliment you have paid me, in your confidences, my friend, is not only deeply appreciated; more, it is an extraordinary coincidence. I know that you had no ulterior motive in telling me about your hobby—because I am the only living person who could know that I am interested in it."

Kennedy gave him a slow, surprised glance of interrogation.

"Eh? I'm afraid I don't quite get you, old man."

"No?" Dudevant laughed gaily and jerked his chair closer. "You desire to buy stones. I have stones, good ones. You could not know that, of course; not a living soul even suspects it. Listen, my friend. You know it is forbidden for officials to meddle with such things; they must live on their miserable pittance of pay, and hope some day to go home on a pension, when they are old and broken—but not many ever enjoy their pensions."

Kennedy shrugged.

"Naturally not. If an official is honest, he's damned to the extent of letting virtue be its own reward—a cursed poor one out here—while other men get rich all around him. If he's dishonest, so are most of the others; the only crime lies in getting caught."

It did not occur to Dudevant that this sort of philosophy was a bit strange on the lips of an American financier. Probably, indeed, it was just the sort of philosophy that coincided with his Gallic notions of American financiers. He nodded earnestly, shrewdly, and lighted a fresh cigaret.

"Of course, of course," he agreed. "You have expressed it exactly, my friend. You may not know the extent to which

the life of a small official is plain and undiluted purgatory. The endless red tape, papers, papers, papers! The small salary, the fear and enmity of his superiors, the inability to trust any one around him, the secluded life off at some hill post surrounded by natives. Perhaps twenty years of it lies ahead of him, before he can hope for civilization, for repose, for France. Small wonder if that man seeks to feather his nest as he sees his superiors do every day."

Kennedy's face was quite blank as he nodded tacit approval of these sentiments.

"So—you comprehend."

The Frenchman spread his hands eloquently, leaned back, fingered his thin pointed mustache for a moment. Kennedy looked at him, then smiled thinly.

"And you've managed it, have you?"

Dudevant's expression was sardonic.

"I have come into an inheritance, yes," he said. "It allowed me to resign my post and go home; the explanation was sufficient. And now I am going to France. In another month I shall be comfortably established in a small *pension*. I shall set about locating a wife with the proper *dot*. I shall have ahead of me an easy and quiet life, with small luxuries in plenty, a few large ones—all of life. But wait. I go to bring you something, something to show you, my friend. I think you will find it of great interest."

He rose and departed with his lithe, sure stride. Kennedy darted one glance after him—one glance from eyes that were shaggy browed, fiercely grim.

"Yes, all of life—luxurious, easy, comfortable!" he muttered. "You've got it all ahead of you, sure; never bothers you a bit that other men had life ahead of them, too—well, you're hooked, or I'm a Dutchman!"

He sat unmoving, looking out at the glittering horizon; their little portion of the bridge deck was to itself, cut off from other passengers.

Presently Dudevant came back, carrying with him a cane of square bamboo, a stick Kennedy had noticed him carrying in Saigon. It was lightly carved between the joints, which as in this variety of bamboo were quite far apart, and each joint bore a neat little ring of yellowed ivory about it, inconspicuous, but also lightly carved.

The Frenchman sat down, looked around to be sure they were alone, then took hold of the stick and turned. It unscrewed from the handle at the top joint; then a second and a third joint came apart in like fashion. It was cunningly made.

"Here we are."

Sun helmet upside down in his lap, Dudevant placed in it little twists of paper which he took from the hollow sections of bamboo; each twist of paper held something. He fingered them, counting them over, and nodded. One or two he put aside in his pocket. Then he handed the helmet and contents to Kennedy.

"There, my friend," he said with great frankness. "Look at these and tell me what you can give for them. I had that stick made, but I am not so sure about such a concealment. I fear it might not get me safely into France, after all. And, you understand, France must be attained. I have gambled heavily and can not afford to lose. I have, indeed, just enough money to reach Marseilles comfortably."

"Stones, are they?" demanded Kennedy, his fingers fumbling at one of the paper twists. "Where'd you get them?"

"Here and there, over the past ten years." Dudevant shrugged. "Some were pledges for loans made with Chinese traders. I had most of the Chinese in my district on the lookout for bargains. Others I got at odd times and places. They're all native cut, if you'll notice. May have to be recut."

Kennedy's face was like stone, giving no hint of belief or disbelief.

One by one he unrolled the paper twists; one by one he carefully examined in his palm the gems thus revealed; one by one he twisted them up again and laid them by. Dudevant sat smoking, watching

him closely, nervously, all absorbed attention. There were only eighteen stones in all, but they were very fine ones—four diamonds of old cut, the rest rubies and sapphires.

When he had seen them all, Kennedy frowned a little and looked at Dudevant with the air of one who had expected great things, only to find small ones.

"Not bad, not bad," he said. "Unfortunately, I would have to buy them all in order to get the diamonds. And I must confess to you that I seek diamonds above all else. Yes, I find stories in diamonds, queer tales, odd anecdotes—but I am not so fond of these antique cuttings. If you had picked up any more modern stones, now—"

Almost reluctantly, it seemed, Dudevant's fingers went to his pocket.

"Well," he admitted, "there is one such diamond here. I could not well remove it from its setting without risk of damaging it. I got it from a native chieftain a couple of years ago, still in the lump of gold that held it. The gold has value, and the stone is fine, though very small—so small that, on the whole, I left it in the gold. Look at it."

Kennedy took the paper twist handed him. It was heavier than the others. He opened it and disclosed a bit of gold in which was set a small, fine diamond. He examined the gold attentively. What it had been was hard to say. Gouges in the back showed where initials had presumably been hacked out; yet there was a certain symmetry about it. Near the diamond in front were a few tiny flecks of black, which had escaped the file or knife scratching the whole thing.

Letting it fall among the rest in the helmet, Kennedy looked up. His face was very bleak and cold; his eyes glimmered strangely.

"My friend," he said in a level, controlled voice, "this diamond indeed tells me a story—or do I fancy it? You got it two years ago, eh?"

Dudevant nodded.

"From a native," he said, a little uneasily.

A harsh laugh broke from Kennedy.

"You are not acquainted with the customs of American universities? No. I thought not. They have societies which they call fraternities. The members have gold pins, some of them set with jewels. This was one such. It was worn by that young man of whom you told me in Saigon —you recall? Young Mackintosh. It bore his initials on the back—"

"No, no; impossible!" said Dudevant swiftly—almost too swiftly. He caught the gleam in the eyes of Kennedy and turned pale.

"Impossible, and shall I tell you why?" said Kennedy. "Because it was barely six months ago that young Mackintosh disappeared. You got this diamond two years ago; hence, impossible. Provided you told the truth. But you did not. You are the official to whose station this unfortunate young man came. These stones are the ones he looted in Bangkok."

"My dear sir," intervened Dudevant, coming to his feet, a deathly pallor in his face, "I do not understand why you talk to me in this manner. I do not understand your insinuations or charges."

"Nonsense!" Kennedy laughed and leaned back in his chair, so that the Frenchman frowned down at him, puzzled by his manner. "You'll understand them all in another moment, my dear fellow. You see, my name isn't really Kennedy at all; I only took that name after hearing about my son's tragedy and presumed death. I didn't think he was the sort to commit suicide, and I was right. My name is Mackintosh."

Dudevant took a step backward. His face was livid, greenish, and horror sat in his eyes. He tried to speak, wet his lips, could say nothing.

And in this moment Kennedy calmly lifted the sun helmet with its contents and flung it out, over the steamer's rail.

A moment later Kennedy sat there alone, lighting a fresh cheroot, looking out at the horizon. His face was like stone, his eyes held no emotion. He remembered the low and terrible cry which had

burst from Dudevant, how the Frenchman had turned and rushed below.

"Should have gone after him, I suppose," he reflected. "But why? It'd do me no good to kill him. I punished him enough. He—"

He glanced up as a shadow fell; it was the purser of the boat, a kindly, bearded old Frenchman. Kennedy motioned to the empty chair, and the purser sat down. After they had exchanged a few amenities, Kennedy turned to the officer.

"Tell me what you think about something, monsieur—what you think would be the reaction of a Frenchman under certain circumstances!"

"With all my heart, monsieur." The purser laughed amusedly. "Your case?"

"That of a man of, say, forty-five," said Kennedy slowly. "A small official out here, who has in a manner sold his soul to get sudden wealth. He gives up his post, burns his bridges, starts for home. He visions Paris, France, awaiting him—a life of comfort, of ease, of retirement. The fact that in order to get his future he has allowed another man to die does not worry him at all. Then, unexpectedly, like a bolt from the blue, he loses every bit of the fortune for which he sold his soul. He also perceives, or rather dreads, exposure, vengeance, punishment. What would such a man do?"

Under the slow words, the laughing face of the purser grew very sober.

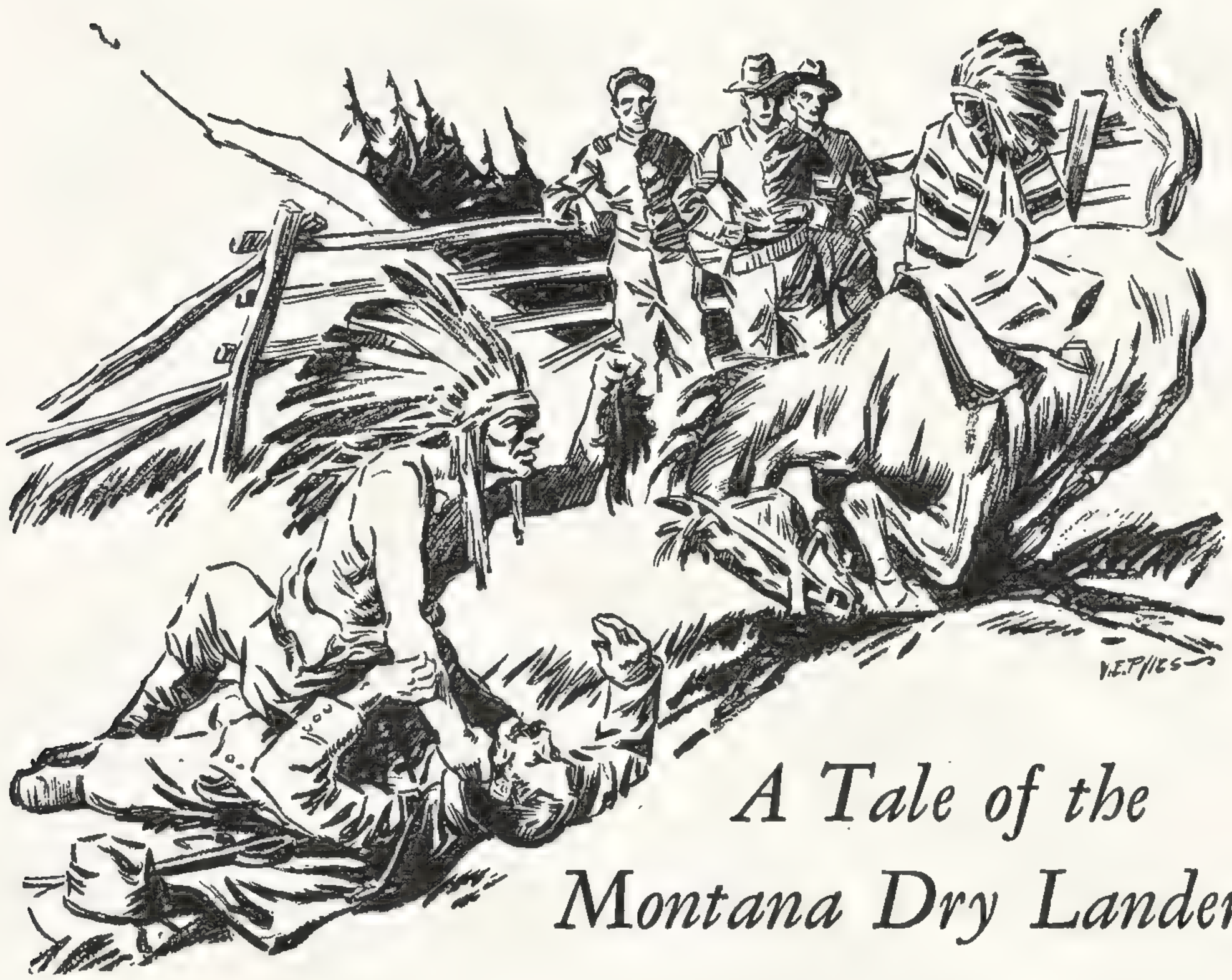
"Ah, monsieur," he rejoined, "I am afraid, very much afraid, that such a man would see only one thing to do—*Mon Dieu!* What was that?"

A sudden sharp sound came from the cabins below them—the sharp, bursting crack of an automatic pistol. Kennedy took the cheroot from between his teeth.

"That, monsieur," he said calmly, "was probably proof that your discernment is most excellent!"

The purser had not stayed to hear his comment, however.

The BATTLE *of* BALD BUTTE



A Tale of the Montana Dry Landers

By HARRY G. HUSE

WE HAD talked Montana history at the dinner table; old times, my host, the veteran homesteader, preferred to call it. Old Montana times.

Over pounded steak fried to a crisp and hot soda biscuits that had borrowed the delicate brown of the curly buffalo grass in the yard outside, we spoke of Lewis and Clark's Homeric voyage up the Missouri and their thirty-day portage around the Falls, a scant score miles away; of McKenzie, the feudal Scot, ruling a mighty empire from within the twenty-foot pickets of the vanished post on the Yellowstone; of Culbertson's traffickings with the Blackfeet through the thick adobe walls of old Fort Benton; and of that incredible steamboat commerce that sparred up the shifting waterway from St. Louis during the boom years when the Sioux had closed the Bozeman Trail.

We had reveled alike in fresh "sarvice" berry pie and the exploits of old Hugh Glass who furnished a meal for a grizzly from his own lean frame and lived to tell about it. Now, lounging in a strip of shade outside the door, we faced thousands of acres of shimmering wheat and rusty summer fallow, sloping up to foothills through which the bull teams had once crawled interminably to Alder Gulch.

"And there," said Dry Land Dawson, gesturing widely with one hand while the other eased open the lower buttons of his Sunday vest, "there she is, laying open and free before you! Old Montana—for all her history—plumb up to date and modern in her new suit of clothes."

There she was indeed. Wheatfields. Dry land farmers' houses, none too mean to support its aerial. Barbed wire fences with patented gates. Graded roads proceeding decorously along the section lines. On those roads the velour upholstered sedans of the latest tractor farming pioneers, speeding toward the metropolis where the movies now not only moved but talked.

There she was—with her tonic air and cloudless sky, her tawny buttes and cool blue distant mountains—the noble, vast and gently rolling plain of the early explorers. And at the thought of her spirited saga of buffalo and Blackfoot, fur trader, prospector and cattle baron, the sight of those sleek, hurrying vehicles was somehow an offense.

"And there they go," I said, with a superior scorn. "The heirs of Jim Bridger and Jedediah Smith and Yellowstone Kelly, rushing across a country fairly reeking with past deeds of hardihood and adventure to huddle in a darkened theater before a blaring loud speaker and a flickering screen."

"Hmmm," said Dry Land Dawson. "That there was Swede Christopherson and his third wife jest went by in the sport cabriolet. Been complainin' a lot lately 'bout his rheumatism, Swede, and being run down generally. Likely he's going up to the Falls principally to take some more of them violet rays."

"Thoughtlessly spurning," I persisted, "the historic soil of two counties to wallow in the dull emotional affairs of the stockbroker's mistress, the society matron's lover, and the gangster's broad—"

"Swede, there," interrupted Dry Land, "has done considerable wallowing in his own affairs. Like you take when he was sparking this last one, before she got to be a widder, and lost his new false teeth—"

He broke off to wave at a speeding car, a-flutter with pennants, that had just negotiated the school house corner on its two outside wheels.

"Herman Rosenkrantz and family," he explained, "looking real gay and festive with all them decorations. Souvenirs he picked up this spring coming back from California. Great feller lately, Herman, for souvenirs."

"Here they live," I still insisted, "on soil more recently historic than any other in the United States—"

A roar of unmuffled cylinders smote the air. There approached on the road, at a speed quite disproportionate to its clamor, a dilapidated wheat truck steered by a hulking man with a curiously puckered face. A woman shrank into one corner of the seat beside him. Above the rattling box behind thrust up the heads of an astounding load of juvenile freight. My host waved a hand. The driver held his wry visage firmly on the road ahead. The woman huddled in her corner. Only from the body of the truck came furtive responses to Dry Land's greeting.

The old homesteader sighed.

"Ed Peeters," he offered, "and his little woman and ten, twelve of their children. Belgian Hare Peeters, he's called by some, him having come originally from Brussels. I judge he's still unfriendly."

I judged so too and sought again my theme and indignation.

"There they go," I repeated, "movie bound, all heedless of the rich epic those peerless old pioneers bequeathed them."

"Maybe," said Dry Land, "they ain't so heedless as you might think. Maybe it'd been better for all concerned if they'd been let stay heedless. Maybe it's proving to be a long, slow process gitting over the last rich epic. You take Peeters and the way his face is all screwed up. You take Herman Rosenkrantz and his souvenirs. Come to think of it you talk jest like the school teacher."

"Which school teacher?" I challenged, for in the memory of the gallant old bachelor her name was legion.

"The educated one," said Dry Land.

"The real educated one with the big horn glasses and long feet that wore these high toned Mother Hubbards they call smocks. The historical one that give us all, 'specially Herman, more old time background than we was able to handle."

"You never told me about her," I accused him.

"Come to think of it," he admitted, "I guess I never did."

II

SHE COME well recommended, this Miss Bulger, [said the old homesteader] hired careful and cautious by a board of trustees whose wives had made them ask her first of all to send them her photograft.

She wasn't no small town girl from the Dakotys that'd been to normal school for a spell and was out in Montana looking for romance and a dry land husband, but a real mature instructor from away back East—Indiany or maybe Ohio—with ideas and purposes and a long chin and big teeth and a real serious looking forehead.

To take a good look at her and her flat heeled shoes and man's haircut you'd say there wasn't no foolishness about her. She seemed jest plain looks and common sense, and all the women folks was pleased when they first see her. The last three, four teachers, the ladies hinted freely, had been less like torches of knowledge than charges of dynamite.

They hadn't had their mind on their work nor let the men keep theirs on theirs neither. They'd been so busy being courted they hadn't had no time left to give the children. Some of the mothers claimed real bitter that all their daughters had learned off them was how to put rouge on their cheeks and make little spit curls in the middle of their foreheads and roll down their stockings to show the dimples, if any, in their knees.

It'd come time, the ladies claimed, for the trustees to discard the bathing beauty contest standards that'd seemed to dictate their selections in the past, and to bring a sobering educational force into the community.

Far as the naked eye could see, that's what they'd done all right in Miss Bulger. She was even more sobering in person than she'd been in the photograft. You only had to take one look at her kind of horse face and the way she was flattened out and slab sided where the others'd been rounded, to be certain she'd be able to put in her five full days a week teaching and have plenty of spare time on her hands besides.

You couldn't hardly blame the women for feeling strong minded about introducing any more disturbing elements into the district. There was already enough to fight about as it was. Seems like we got a most accidental-like and mixed-up population.

You take Herman Rosenkrantz there, he's a south of Germany German. His closest neighbors is a Dane and two, three families of Swedes. North of them's some Finns and Hunyaks that used to work in the mines. Over west's a kind of colony of neighbors that enjoyed squabbling so much back in Kansas they all picked up and come out here together so's they could keep it up.

Sprinkled round here and there there's some scattering folks with human faults and weaknesses from Washington and Missouri and Idaho and Alberta. And then there's this here Belgian, Peeters.

Back in the beginning when we first homesteaded and was mostly strangers we'd had a gay social life in the community. But folks had been living close together long enough now to git all hostiled up with squabbles and split up in groups that don't have nothing to do with each other.

Most of the ruckuses in the past have been about jest ordinary matters like boundary fences, and ungentlemanly conduct at dances, and slanderous remarks, and bulls roaming at large, and Daniel Boone weddings. They'd start from something unimportant like that and flare up and maybe take deputy sheriffs to settle. Then they'd smolder along with

folks taking sides and jest waiting for another excuse to jump at each other.

There ain't really but one first class feud, the one between Herman Rosenkrantz and Peeters, and that's always been so one sided that folks have kind of forgot about it. This Peeters, he's a big strapping feller with that scared wife and them twelve, thirteen childern you seen in the back end of the truck. He'd come from Belgium with that woman of his when he was first married, and to hear him talk he was sure glad he come.

I guess Belgium must of been glad too, because he couldn't of been much use to the country, feeling about it the way he done. He was some kind of an anarchist, and he'd go on at a great rate about having been throwed in the army when he was a young feller and the best years of his life stolen.

He'd predict all kinds of revolutions and massacrees in Europe, with the heads of the capitalists and kings tumbling into a basket like they once done in France. He'd kind of froth at the mouth and slobber down the long bushy beard he had growing off the bottom of his face when he told of the inhumanities his country was guilty of down in the Belgian Congo.

He had four poor old collar galled horses that he'd larruped down to skin and bones, and he'd work his wife in the field too when she wasn't to home having another baby. He'd knock off himself any time, telling his wife to go right on without him, to talk with anybody that happened to be going by. He'd tell them what a rotten country he come from and how even the United States needed some work done on it here and there before it would be a fit place to live.

Herman Rosenkrantz lived fairly near neighbors to him. You'd of thought the two of them might of got along pretty well together, it being known that Herman had come to this country when he was a young feller to git out of serving in the German army. Seemed like he ought to have violent feelings about the rotten state of affairs in the old country too.

But Herman wasn't that kind. He was big and slow and took things gentle and easy. Germany, he said, was a nice place to live in. There wasn't no other country where you could git such good beer. But the Fatherland, he thought, was making a big mistake being so military and warlike. He'd come away because he didn't want to be mixed up with that mistake.

Herman was happy to be in the United States where a man didn't git ordered around like he did back there. He liked this country fine, and he was grateful to the Government for giving him a half section free. Him and his wife and childern was working hard to make something of it.

There in the beginning Herman was friendly enough with Peeters. He'd stop and pass the time of day with him when he was going by. But he hadn't no time to listen to them long speeches about what was wrong with Europe, and there didn't develop no strong friendship between the two of them.

THAT was the way things was when the war broke out and we got news of how the Germans was violating Belgium. You'd expect Peeters to be real glad that finally the country he hates so much is having some bad luck. You'd expect too that Herman would have something to say in defense of the Fatherland, having felt so kindly toward it.

But that ain't their two natures. Herman shakes his head and says a madness has come on the German people, and he saw it coming on, and he's ashamed and sorry for them. And Peeters, that's always been wanting to drench the streets of Brussels with blood, turns into one of the most rabid Belgian mouth patriots you'd ever want to see. He even lets on like he's thinking of going back and helping save the Belgian nation by driving the Germans back into Germany where they belong.

First off, Peeters picks on the Crown Prince and the Kaiser. After while he kind of played out on them and looked round for some one closer. That was when he went after poor old Herman.

Here, he claimed, talking about Herman, was a German—like them that was committing all them atrocities—right here in our midst. Here was one of the blond beasts you read about. Probably, he said, Herman was right now glorying in his secret mind about all the rapine and plunder that was being committed by his brothers over there. Maybe he was even figgering on going back and having a hand in it.

Poor Herman didn't hardly know what to make of it. There at first he took it kind of calm and good natured, like a big old dog that's got a little dog snapping at him. But Peeters kept talking louder and more positive. After while some folks begun thinking some of what he said must be true and that down inside Herman was really something dark and bloody and cruel that'd take pleasure in despoiling women and dashing out childern's brains agin a wall. They got to looking sidewise at him.

Herman was hurt and upset by it. He was as much agin the violation of Belgium as anybody else. But Peeters was so violent he most had to defend himself agin the things the Belgian was saying, and he couldn't seem to stand up for himself without seeming to stand up for what the Germans was reported as doing.

When finally he tried to pass the whole thing off as a joke and make some humorous remarks about it, he was so blundering and such a poor hand at joking that lots of folks took him serious. Like when he said, *ja*, sure he was working for the Kaiser and was going to set his own wheatfield afire to keep the grain from going to the Allies.

Folks kept pulling away from him suspicious, and it got worse as things went along. When the *Lusitania* was finally torpedoed Peeters raised such a ruckus that a mob come near going over to poor old Herman's to lynch him.

When we went into the war folks should of been able to see what a good American old Herman must of been right along. He let his two oldest boys go off right away to join the Marines, though he needed them bad on the ranch that spring, and he bought Liberty Bonds without nobody prodding him.

Peeters that'd been claiming he had a good mind to go back there himself and help fight, he let out a big holler about the draft taking all the able bodied men off the ranches. He squirmed every which way trying to git his oldest boy exempted so's he could stay home and help make a fortune raising two-dollar wheat.

Folks should of appreciated old Herman then. But they'd got their minds made up a man by the name of Rosenkrantz was bound to be pro-German, and they still listened to Peeters and suspected Herman, and said likely his boys had gone into the Marines quick like that to be German spies. Even when his oldest boy was killed at Château-Thierry some said Herman had it coming to him 'cause there wouldn't never of been no war if it hadn't been for Germans like him.

That was the way things had been between Herman and Peeters. Herman and his family had long ago stopped going places and had kept away from other people.

Herman saddened down pretty bad after the war, with all his injustices to think over. He kept plumb away from Peeters. I guess he didn't trust himself. The Belgian found another outrage to shift his talk to. He threatened Bolshevism agin the Government 'cause they didn't keep up the wartime price of wheat.

WELL, Miss Bulger arrives among us, as I say, looking even more educational than her photograft. She moves into the teacherage alongside the school house without no three, four men gitting in each other's way trying to help her, like it's been in the past, and loses no time settling down there.

Inside the first couple of days all the women manage to come see her. They like her better'n ever after that first visit. Somebody'd reported that she'd brought a bigger trunk than any of the previous

school teachers, and they been worrying some about that. But when she'd come to unpack it it's held mostly books where the others'd been loaded with flesh colored stockings and pink silk underwear. She's got the books piled round everywhere.

They could see for themselves that they wasn't no flighty novels neither, but history books mostly, all of them showing they been handled a lot and read.

History, that was her weakness, she told them; and she told me the same thing when I first met her. It'd been her hobby for the last half dozen years, 'specially the history of the Rocky Mountain region. She already knowed everything there was to know from books about it. She could tell you right off every place where Lewis and Clark camped for the night, and who first found the different passes through the mountains, and even what tribe of Indians stole John Colter's pants.

Her interest in the subject has finally brought her out here to see the country with her own eyes. She's looking forward eagerly, she says, to her close association with the people of this community—the last of the Western pioneers.

It ain't until she's been here a month that she gits to talking to me about these heedless people that are now plowing the plains where the buffalo thundered and the Blackfoot whooped and the bull-puncher cussed and swore, without none of them knowing this was once the stage of a big epic.

She's plumb disappointed with the West. Not that the country itself ain't up to expectations, or that she's been hoping to find villains and pure womanhood and heroes like most of the schoolma'ams that come out here after a literary acquaintance with the country. She's too well posted for that.

She's known before she come here that mostly this part of Montana's shifted over to wheat, and knows more now about furrow drills and duckfoot weeders than about slick ears and running irons. But these dry landers being pioneers theirselves and not so far away from the stirring old days of buffalo and Indians and trail herds from Texas, she's expected to find them kind of steeped in the lore of the country and marching forward, with their heads throwed back, in the steps of the old time trail blazers.

She ain't counted on finding them so shallow and trifling minded. Why, she ain't come across no one, she says, outside of me that ever heard of John Bozeman or Colonel Sanders or Granville Stuart, though there's plenty to tell her intimate personal details in the life of Adolph Menjou and Gloria Swanson and Gilda Gray.

These people round here, she goes on, are not the least bit historically conscious. It's a downright shame for them to be living right on the ground where a stirring saga took place without their knowing or caring anything about it; and she's got her mind made up to do something to change this deplorable state of affairs.

I speculate some about what she'll be able to do. The people round here are considerable of a dead weight to git off the ground, even on such small educational matters as "burn your Roosian thistles" and "git rid of your roosters if you want better eggs," and I can't imagine them taking in anything as solid as history.

It's likely, I tell myself, she'll jest bear down hard on the subject in teaching the children, and trust them to carry it home to the grownups the way they're supposed to do about other advanced things like "be sure to brush the teeth twice daily" and "sleep with the windows open" and "clean your finger nails."

But no such roundabout way for Miss Bulger. She puts her mind on the matter serious, and presently comes out with an announcement that there's going to be a series of social and historical meetings at the school house every Saturday night—lunch served, a congenial, instructive time promised; come one, come all; no admission charged.

She gits a good turnout the first night, everybody being curious. Folks come edging into the school house kind of sus-

picious, remembering the last entertainment there some years before—the one it took three deputies to straighten out before the evening was over. They herd together in bunches, feeling foolish setting there in the younguns' seats.

Miss Bulger must of got a kind of shock, looking over that crowd setting there solid and quiet, like they was dasting anybody to interest them or make them have a good time. But she was equal to it. She got up in front on the platform and started off on her historical lecture. And say! She hadn't been at it five minutes before she had that crowd a-going.

She started way back with the first French trappers on the lower Missouri River, and then the Louisiana Purchase; and Lewis and Clark setting out into territory no one knowed anything about.

She got action into it. She made you feel jest how them fellers must of felt starting out blind into that great, uncharted wilderness. When she told about the way they cordelled their boat up the hard stretches and the men on the party that was proud to be called half horse and half alligator, danged if you couldn't hear them puffing and cussing and see them sweat.

Yes, sir! She had that crowd right on the edge of their seats, and when she finished they didn't want her to quit, but give her a big hand and another one when she invited them to come back in a week for the next lecture. There was some so stirred up and excited that they talked while they was eating supper, which is unusual in this country.

She had the district jest eating up her history. They turned out strong for every meeting. When she branched out into research and got up a relic hunting expedition to go down to the Missouri where they used to be an old trading post, half the neighborhood turned out with shovels to help her dig. They spaded up a good half acre and sifted out a couple of quarts of colored beads and three, four bushels of broken jugs and whisky bottles.

She fixes up the plunder they find as an exhibit in one corner of the school room. I'm surprised when she comes right out open, displaying them jugs and bottles. Most educational historians don't have much to say about the whisky background of all early Montana history. They'll talk mostly about the white man bringing civilization and a more advanced culture to the bloodthirsty Indians, and about the heroic pioneers that come out here with higher motives than the general run of folks. But she feeds her history to the community straight, and don't try to cover up the dirty places.

That's the way she made it interesting. The men she talks about are jest ordinary fellers doing exciting things. What she's trying to git across is that from the very start the story of Montana's been a big story of struggle. She's got the fur traders trying to git the Indians' furs for little or nothing, and opposition traders coming in to grab off some of the gravy.

She's got Indians stealing each other's horses and white men stealing the Indians' land and killing their buffalo. She's got miners struggling for the best claims and outlaws taking their gold away from them after it's dug, and cattle and sheep men struggling over range, and the big interests struggling for copper.

She sticks to facts and makes out a big story of fighting and squabbling that comes closer to being the truth about Montana than any I ever before heard. It stirs people up and keeps them that way all winter.

Now and then when I see that crowd setting on the edge of their chairs with their eyes shining, taking in everything she says about ruckuses over beaver furs, and hangings by the Vigilantes, and buying up the State Legislature to see who's going to be Senator, I have to feel there's trouble lurking around somewhere. Folks that've had past quarrels'll git to fidgeting in their seats and eyeing each other hostile.

THERE ain't no doubt but what the community is gitting historically conscious. Everywhere folks git together you'll hear them arguing about this or that historical event like it was something took

place yesterday. You'll see a couple of women in town shopping meet up and git their heads together. You'll slide up alongside expecting to hear some first class scandal. But, instead of its being one of their neighbors they're picking to pieces, it'll be some old fur trader of the forties that kept himself three, four Indian wives.

On the surface the whole thing's a refreshing change for the community. But now and then I'll have misgivings. Like one time I talk with Herman Rosenkrantz and find him real stirred up inside. He's been coming to all the lectures, setting off by himself calm and quiet and missing nothing.

He's took in everything Miss Bulger's said about the unfair way the Indians was treated and it's got mixed up, I guess, with his own troubles, 'cause all of a sudden he says out of a clear sky that sometimes he wishes he'd been a warrior with Crazy Horse that day of the Custer Massacree down on the Little Big Horn. We'd been talking in his yard where he's sharpening his wife's butcher knife on the grindstone, and talking that way with that pig sticker in his hand he looked so fierce for a minute it kind of scared me.

It's jest as well, I git to thinking, that it's coming on spring and folks'll soon be too busy planting wheat to be thinking about history or anything else, when all of a sudden Miss Bulger springs the idea she's been working up to all along. It's to be the big climax to the season's lectures—a pageant—something like these tableaux kids'll go through in school exercises, only on a bigger scale with everybody in the district taking part. It's to be called the Battle of Bald Butte.

She's got her idea for it from finding out from old records that a real scrimmage between whites and Indians once took place right over there near the foot of the old butte. It wasn't really a battle, jest a one sided fracas between a bunch of soldiers and a village of Piegans that was hustling for the Canadian Border to keep from being sent to a reservation. Compared with other Indian fights it hadn't no importance. But it had happened right in these parts. She figgered she could take it as a kind of jumping off place, and take some literary license with it, work in glimpses of what went before and come after, and make it big and dramatic and significant.

Looking back now, it's hard to understand how she ever got all us mature people to go in for the thing with willingness and even enthusiasm. She'd worked us up real guileful in her lectures, talking about this having been the stage for a big epic, and that the drama ain't all played out yet, and that the people right before her are still actors engaged in the struggle that's been the history of Montana from the start. We all fall for it, even before she mentions having people out from town to watch—and maybe our pitchers in the Sunday papers.

Everybody's enthusiastic, as I say. But right from the start there begun to be some hard feelings about handing out the parts. I was real satisfied myself, being Meriwether Lewis in the prolog, and the stage manager of the big battle, and then in the epilog this feller Campbell that was knowed as the Father of Dry Farming. Some felt Peeters shouldn't of been made captain of the soldiers, being none too popular in the community, and that being considered kind of a hero part. But she'd chose him because he was long and rangy looking and had them natural whiskers.

There was some, too, couldn't understand giving Herman Rosenkrantz with his blue eyes and light hair the part of an Indian, nor of having the Scandinavians and Finns and Bohunks Indians too. But she'd counted on their high cheekbones and figgered they could cover up their hair.

We jangled along through our preparations and practise, straining relations pretty badly here and there. But we come, in due course of time, without no serious trouble, to the day of the big event.

The stage was the open prairie up there on the old battle ground near the butte—

a couple of acres we'd marked off on the back and sides with strips of snow fence. It hadn't been possible to git everybody and everything all together for a big complete rehearsal. But they'd all been put through their tricks at one time or another, and we'd got a kind of pit dug out in front where Miss Bulger could stay hid when she wasn't reciting the reading places and could prompt folks and keep them doing the right thing and going through their parts.

It was fine May weather, and the pageant had been well advertised all over the county. By one o'clock when it was supposed to start it seemed like half the automobiles in this part of the country was parked up there on the prairie by Bald Butte where the saga was to come off.

WE WAS late gitting started. The actors, which included everybody in the district and all the cayuses that was still to be found, with a good sprinkling of dogs, had been instructed to dress to home and arrive ready to appear as nearly as possible. But last minute alterations was necessary to most of the costumes, and there was several like myself that had to take several different parts and needed to make changes. So we'd borrowed a big stable tent off'n a road contractor and set it up behind the snow fence for a dressing room.

Inside the tent was a scene of tolerable confusion. It was bad enough around noon, with the actors in the epic drammer arriving, and having to criticize each other's costumes, and snickering a little, and gitting mad at being snickered at, and some of the prouder matrons wondering if maybe they didn't look too natural and sloppy in squaw costume, and giving some second thought touches to the riggings of their husbands. Miss Bulger was hustling around and impressing us with the importance of being ready to start on time, and reminding some folks that'd been weak on their parts what they was to do, and being sure the soldiers and warriors got nothing but blank ammunition in their guns and cold tea in the whisky bottles that figgers in the truthful representation of the white man's early relations with the Indians.

It was kind of nerve wracking inside that tent right there at the beginning, and real trying at one o'clock with the audience all gathered and waiting and still considerable to be done before the pageant can start. By one-thirty when it's got to be now or never, with the spectators restless and some yelling, 'specially them that's taken advantage of the wait to do some serious drinking, and costumes that wasn't too well fastened together in the first place beginning to give way, and younguns quarreling and gitting tired and cross, what with the heat and dust—why, it's no place you'd want to stay at all inside the dressing tent.

Finally everybody's as near ready as they'll ever be this side of Judgment Day. Miss Bulger goes out and bows to the crowd, which quiets down fairly well and recites the piece she's wrote that introduces the prolog. Then she takes her place in her pit, and blows three times on a dog whistle she's got, and the pageant starts.

First there's Meriwether Lewis, which is me, and William Clark, that's the Bohunk lives over next the schoolhouse, and our men, splitting up at the mouth of the Marias to go up each fork and find out which is the real Missouri River. It's a easy scene, with the story of it printed in the programs that's been handed round to the crowd before the pageant starts.

'Bout all we have to do is stand with our hands up shading our eyes, looking in perplexity every which way across the country, and looking at our compasses and then shaking hands and going off different ways. We do it real neat and noble, and the crowd gives us loud cheers and a big hand.

The next scene's the coming of the American Fur Company traders and the building of Fort Piegan. That goes off all right too, with the audience fairly quiet and appreciative during the first part and

only certain ones gitting kind of rowdy and disorderly when it works along to where the traders start giving the Indians whisky in exchange for furs.

There's some yells from the crowd at this point—to them that's playing the part of the Indians not to drink it all up, but to pass it around and let others have a pull at the bottles too. One feller shouts out and says if it's first class booze and not the kind of moon we've had to drink for the last six years he wishes to hell he was a full blood Indian.

Herman Rosenkrantz is easy the star of this part of the pageant. He's one of the Indian chiefs, and while he trades his furs for whisky like the rest, and drinks the whisky, and acts like he's drunk on the white man's firewater, he does it quiet and slow and sad jest like he knowed all along the ruination of his race that's in the bottle. Along with the story that's printed in the program it's real impressive, even though somebody suggests from the audience that Herman wouldn't look so mournful if 'stead of whisky it was lager beer.

We run along through the first part with things going fairly well and not too many mixups, and the audience seeming to follow the development of historical events. We're gitting close to the main part, which is the Battle of Bald Butte. It's all explained in the program how Miss Bulger has took some literary license with a actual battle that occurred right where we're standing and has give it the significance of Custer's Last Stand and Chief Joseph's Raid, and the audience is all set for something big.

There in the dressing tents us actors are gitting ready for the climax. It's the high spot of the whole pageant with everybody taking part. There's to be an Indian village and squaws and papooses and warriors, and troopers finally surrounding the aborigines, and dashing through the village, and a bloody engagement, with the Indians who've lost ground steadily all through the pageant finally being licked and having, as the program says, their spirits beaten and broken for all time.

Some of the home talent inside the tent there are gitting kind of tired and wore out and wishful for the pageant to hurry up and git over. The heat and dust and jangling of younguns have been most more than they can stand. They're historically conscious all right, but with the giving away of costumes here and there, and blue overalls showing up through the busted seams in Indian buckskin leggings made out of paper cambric, and the stuck-on whiskers of cavalrymen beginning to itch, and the heavier matrons wishing they could shuck off their moccasins and git back to their shoes, and the war bonnets molting their dyed rooster feathers, it's gitting harder and harder for folks to be happy because they're actors in a big epic drama.

Maybe the illusion, which Miss Bulger has impressed on us as being very important, has been preserved for the audience out there waiting for the big scene. But there ain't much of it left inside the stable tent.

Here and there younguns have fought, and feeling has growed up between parents that tried to straighten the matter out by sticking up for their own childern. One or two squabbles of long standing is threatening to break out agin. Mrs. Ed Culp, who's had the part of a noble pioneer mother in a calico wrapper, has said how Mrs. Ptacek had ought to keep right on wearing her Indian costume after the pageant's over, 'cause she's always kept house like a squaw anyway and has raised childern that are savages.

Somebody's told Mrs. Ptacek and she's said she may keep house like a squaw, but thank God she ain't built like one from the neck down like Mrs. Culp is. The Bohemians and Swedes who are Indians too have kind of took sides with Mrs. Ptacek and drawed off by theirselves, while the folks from Kansas have stuck with Mrs. Culp.

The only one that has seemed really to keep calm and filled with the spirit of the drama they're presenting is Herman Rosenkrantz. Ever since Herman was so picked on and talked agin during that

time of the war he's had a kind of dignified reserve and poise. He's gone through the parts he's had in the pageant so far thoughtful and conscientious, keeping a program tucked down inside his Indian leggings and studying over the story we're depicting every chance he's got while we're waiting in the tent. Now he's reading the part that tells about the big issues that come to a climax in this battle. Spite of the noise and jangling going on around him he's completely lost in it. He's following the words along with his finger as he reads them, and his eyes are glowing.

I'm close enough so's I can look over his shoulder. The Indian, it says, has come to his last desperate stand. With basic right on his side, and might on the side of the white man—lied to and about and persecuted—misunderstood and humiliated—he bows to a superior force. The hand of all America is agin him.

Old Herman reads and reads that, and makes a *tch-tch-tch* noise with his tongue. There's a deep, sorrowful look in his eyes, until he raises his head and sees Peeters across the tent strutting around in the costume he's to wear as the boss of the white forces that humbles the Indians. The sad part of the look dies out and leaves something blue and cold that makes me kind of shiver.

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THE WHISTLE blows outside and the actors start stringing out of the tent. The audience quiets down for the occasion. Through a gap in the snow fence on to the two acre stage comes winding the Indian procession.

It's impressive. There's the warriors riding ahead, with Herman Rosenkrantz leading, wrapped to the eyes in a bright blanket. There's the women riding ponies that's drawing travois loaded with younguns. There's dogs and dust and enough hubbub left over from the arguments in the tent to make it seem real lifelike and natural.

The procession halts, and the squaws set up a camp. The braves ride around on their horses. Old Herman comes up toward the front of the stage and stands there, wrapped in his blanket, looking off over the prairie that's once been his and is now about to be took away from him forever.

The camp quiets down. Miss Bulger, from where she's hid, speaks the part of the piece that tells what's going on. Some of the warriors ride off to see if they can find any buffalo left to kill and eat. They come dashing back with the news that the white men are coming.

The warriors all git back on their horses, and the women and childern run around every which way. There's a yell outside. Then the soldiers come riding on the stage, with Peeters leading. The Indians stand them off as well as they can, everybody yelling and shooting. But the Indians have to fall back, and the soldiers ride right through the camp. Some of the Indians fall down like they been killed or wounded.

The soldiers turn their horses when they git through the camp, and come riding back ag'in. Here's where the most of the rest of the Indians is to fall down shot, Herman Rosenkrantz, the chief, among them. He's to drop, fatally wounded, and then when the soldiers are ready to start cheering for their victory he's to rise on one elbow, struggle to his feet and stand facing the West before he falls down stone dead while Miss Bulger speaks the rest of the piece about the unhappy and inevitable fate of the Indian.

That's the way it's to go, and that's the way it would of gone all right, I guess, if that second trip through Peeter's horse hadn't stumbled.

That was too much for Herman. From the very beginning of the fighting he'd had a big struggle going on inside him. He'd kept looking kind of pathetic at Miss Bulger there in her pit, and fingering the program in his belt like he was trying desperate to forget his own feelings and stick to history and not make a botch of things.

His fellow Indians, the Swedes and Finns and Bohemians, have had to

struggle with their feelings some too. It's hard to take a licking in public, even a makebelieve one. Heated up with the yelling and shooting and hard feelings back in the tent and memories of old quarrels, they don't like to git the worst end of the battle. Some that was supposed to be shot in the first charge is still up on their feet, waiting for the troopers to come back through, kind of looking at Herman, the chief, like they was hoping he'd change history a little and make it less one sided a battle.

Herman had held himself in, as I say, and gone through with his part right up to the time Peeters comes dashing back with the soldiers and draws a bead on him to give him his fatal wound. Right there is where Peeters' horse stumbles. He finds a badger hole that the stage committee had overlooked, puts a front foot in it, and down he comes on his nose, with Peeters diving head first over his ears.

Peeters lands spraddled out right at Herman's feet, madder'n a hornet, cussing Herman like it was him dug the badger hole. Old Herman's still trying to stick to history and hang on to his feelings. But he's stood all that he can stand. He's got all his troubles mixed up in that slow, heavy mind of his with the injustices of the Indians. He rumbles low in his throat like a old buffalo bull, and then he throws off his blanket and lets out a bloodthirsty yell to his brother red men. They yelp back at him, and the real Battle of Bald Butte's started.

There's a shriek from Miss Bulger, and yells of encouragement from the crowd that's been made so historically conscious all their sympathy's with the Indians. All round through the village the troopers and aborigines have throwed away their weapons and are staging first class fist fights. Right up in front in the middle of the stage Herman's got Peeters down on the ground with his hands all twisted up in the Belgian's beard, a-pounding his head up and down on the sod as hard as he's able.

There's more yells from the crowd. In the growing confusion some feller yells to Herman why don't he make a good job of the Belgian and scalp him. It's a joke the audience appreciates and greets with loud laughter—Peeters, now that his hat's off, having a dome that's bald and shiny as an egg.

But in Herman's present frame of mind it ain't the right advice to give him. He fumbles in his belt where's he's had a old skinning knife sticking, and it's out before anybody can do anything to stop him. Right there before the whole crowd, with women folks turning pale and some fainting, he gits a good grip with one hand on the billy goat whiskers growing out of Peeters' chin. He pulls them up neat and tight like Miss Bulger's once described the operation, and makes a quick pass with the knife. Then he lets out a yell of triumph and holds up the results—and waves it!

THE OLD homesteader fell silent, fumbling for fine-cut.

"The pageant," he admitted, "ended right then and there. There wasn't no epilog, and the audience had to go home without never learning jest how the events they'd saw was tied up with present day dry farming.

"Miss Bulger," he recalled, "seemed to feel real bad about the outcome of the performance, and yet real complimented at having made the district so historically conscious. If she'd stayed on another year, or even until the trial where they had deputies setting in every third seat, she might of been prouder still, seeing the way her lectures about this being naturally a country of struggle bore fruit in a wakening up of all the old quarrels and several that was brand new.

"The big trial," he explained, at my query. "Not the disorderly conduct actions agin the common fighters. Herman Rosenkrantz's trial, in to the county seat, on the charge of mayhem.

"It turned out the law already had a name for what he'd done. Mayhem! Depriving a person by violence of any limb, member or organ.

"Mayhem. One of them loose legal

phrases that Peeters made the district attorney twist round to take in a hank of hair and a patch of hide no bigger than a dollar. Herman had took it away neat and tidy. Outside some bruises, that was all the harm he'd done the Belgian. Seemed satisfied, Herman did, with that one act of violence, and give up the knife freely without moving on to murder as some had hoped.

"He even turned to and helped us stop the last of the fist fights and revive the fainted. We made a big point of that at the trial. Me and five other witnesses got up and swore the whole thing was jest a stage accident—a dramatic mishap, we called it, that simply come about from overacting.

"It'd of been easy for anybody to believe, seeing Herman setting there in the courtroom, quiet and calm and friendly now, with all his sour feelings mellowed, if only he'd of been more reasonable about the scalp.

"No, he wouldn't give it up under no circumstances. We had to go back on the stand and swear it was lost in the scrimmage, even though I could see a little end of it sticking up out of his breast pocket like one of these here fancy handkerchiefs. Jest as well we'd packed the jury."

The old homesteader tilted forward in his chair. His faded blue eyes swept the reaches of prairie.

"Soil," he mused, somewhat irrelevantly, "more recently historic than any other in the United States— Great feller, Herman, as I said, for souvenirs!"

THE YELLOW heat of late afternoon settled with the ocher dust over the Formosan seaport village of Kokoshiru. Japanese schoolboys in uniforms and knapsacks strutted home through the Chinese quarter. Bicycles grooved the soft earth with the marks of their treads. Not even a picturesque water carrier slopped his singing way along the streets from the river; the Japanese—Kokoshiru, on the map, may still be seen indicated as T'sing-fu-sui—had installed street hydrants, together with custom houses and Buddhist temples and laboratories and clinics and *yoshiwaras*.

And so it was little wonder that the party from the *Edward ten Broeck* were sorely disappointed. There was dirt in Kokoshiru, but they had seen plenty of that in China. There were quaint inns and teahouses and second class *geisha*, all of which had been thoroughly investigated in Yokohama and Nagasaki. Plenty of brown men in loincloths and brown women with tattooed cheeks, mouths red stained from betel nut juice, but it had all been seen before.

At the end of the street, visible through the old city gate which the Japanese had left standing—the wall around the town was razed—were white wastes stretching to the horizon, shallow fields in which evaporating sea water deposited salt; and

STRANGE PLACES

A Story of Formosa

By SIDNEY HERSCHEL SMALL

what was interesting in that? The party from the *Edward ten Broeck* were bored. And hot. Their high, pneumatic tired rickshaws were waiting for them. What better than to admit that this supposedly wild Formosan town was without interest and to return to the boat for iced drinks and showers before dinner? That was the only advantage in a miserable afternoon; it made chilled consommé and salads and cold, still Rhine wine taste delicious.

"We'll try Amoy next," Willis Simpson said suddenly, turning away from the shop before which they were standing, where they had been staring at plaited baskets of *lichis* and pomegranates and small sweet pineapples. "I've heard they've got some joints there that'll give a night club hostess a kick. Let's get out of here. The smell of those roast ducks on that tray are slaying me."

Westgaard suddenly resented young Simpson more than usual. It was bad enough that the Asiatic-Import had sent him to hand nurse this bunch of pleasure seeking youngsters through a part of the Orient; to spend several days at Amoy would be extremely disagreeable; he supposed Amoy would be what that boyish girl by his side called "too wonderful". He wondered bleakly what would happen if he wired the Tokyo head of the A-I that the *ten Broeck* was sailing for Amoy, and that he himself was returning to Japan.

They were likable kids, all of them, except that young Simpson was different from any man Westgaard had ever met—he had not been in the States for many years—but Westgaard would have preferred sitting on the ship's deck talking with Simpson's father about the race riots and the election and the opera and just what this new rule about fumbles was.

The young ought to enjoy things in strange places, find savor in the new. Westgaard desperately attempted to resume the rôle the A-I had cast for him.

"You'll observe that the Chinese here wear the Cantonese head covering," he said. "They're Cantonese at heart; that's why they don't like the whites, and why I can't get 'em to talk. Here—look at that young fellow with the glossy pigtails, with red ribbons tied around 'em; he's on his way—"

A pert girl laughed.

"Don't tell me he's on his way to ask for the hand of one of these Formosan flappers, Mr. Westgaard! Shall I give him the eye, girls, and—"

"He's drawn the lucky stick," said the gaunt A-I man. "He's on his way to kill some one."

They all laughed at that; Westgaard's lips tightened, but he said nothing.

"You're a rotten guide, Westgaard," young Simpson said. "Just like the old man—" Westgaard stared straight before him—"who took us through Chinatown in 'Frisco. A lot of hooey; that's all we've gotten. In Japan you told us that a bunch of peaceful fellows we saw walking down the street were going to bump

off a politician or some one, but we didn't see them do it."

"Naturally not; when the *gorotsuki*—the assassins—saw us following them, they decided not to."

"And in some Jap village or other, you told us that an old ape was on his way to stick a knife in his guts, but you wouldn't let us go along and get a peep at the performance."

"No," Westgaard said briefly. "That's right. I wouldn't."

"He didn't want to hurt our feelings," the pert girl giggled. "The sight of blood's supposed to make women faint." She did not add, "In his day," but Westgaard knew well enough what she was thinking.

Simpson was so frankly bored with everything Westgaard had tried to show them, so uncomfortably hot, that he said—

"I had more excitement in school than I've had since the Old Man sailed; we ought to call Westgaard Father Goose for his yarns—"

"Cheer leading," said Westgaard, "must be a wild sport."

The younger man flushed, and the girl at Westgaard's side laughed with true enjoyment. She pulled off her tight hat and shook her short hair free as she said—

"Mr. Westgaard slapped you that time, Will. He—"

"A cheer leader—" young Simpson began angrily, but Westgaard, tired of being baited rather than angry, cut him off with:

"I know all about 'em. Just when you want to get the signals, they start the stands howling—they didn't have huddles in my day."

"That's twice," Ora Cairnes said. "But —" to Westgaard—"you'll admit that sightseeing isn't—hasn't—been very inviting."

Westgaard looked about him slowly before replying. Simpson, never forgetting his importance, in whites which had become rumpled; Simpson, whose father owned the *ten Broeck*, and who undoubtedly was the son of a stockholder in the Asiatic-Import. Three young men, Tennison and Jones and Costigan, rather decent chaps, who let Simpson do most of the talking. The pert girl—Amy something. A tall blonde always in lilac, called Sugar by the rest; Westgaard did not know what her name might be, although he had been with them for long weeks; Georgia West, who laughed much and said more, and the little Cairnes girl beside him. Four boys, four girls and Westgaard. With a grimace which easily might have become a grin, Westgaard supposed that a bit of Simpson's pique might be because of the Cairnes girl; all afternoon she had stayed beside Westgaard.

And so he said soberly:

"Perhaps it isn't very interesting. I'm sorry. You've just seen what your eyes have seen, probably. There are always hidden things in the Orient. You've got to guess at them. Like the jewel that singsong girl wore—where did it come from? Who gave it to her? Or was it her own, and did she come from a great family? And if she did, why be in such a place, with a jewel of great price remaining to be sold? You've got to expect the—the unexpected in the East. Why, you can take my word for it that—"

"These ducks stink, and the barrel of pork beside it cries to heaven," Simpson snapped. "I'm sick of playin' tourist, as if I were Mr. Cook himself. I'm darned disgusted with the whole business. Let's get back to the ship."

Westgaard's amused eyes flicked into Ora Cairnes', and then went on to the offending glazed brown ducks and the barrel of cubed meat, flanked with oranges and persimmons and pineapples. As soberly as before, he said:

"That's it, Simpson; you only see a duck, and a tub of what you believe to be pig. But that's the way the Orient is. You've got to look closer. Then you'll see that—"

"The duck was the sacred bird of the god Goofus, stolen from his ranch over on the Great Stinking Divide, and the pork's really dragon meat killed by St. Plum Blossom—come on, Ora; let's go."

WESTGAARD shrugged and clapped his hands for the rickshaw pullers. As the carts were drawn up for the party, Chinese and Formosans began to emerge from their houses; men elbowed women aside for a final look at the foreigners. Husbands, fathers, guest husbands from the Houses of the Half Closed Gates; skins of every hue from yellow to brown.

Ora Cairnes, walking to her rickshaw with Simpson at her side, said easily—

"They look pretty fierce, don't they?"

"If I gave 'em a dirty look, they'd run to their holes," Simpson told her. "A chink's a chink, and these Formosans—these savages—that Westgaard said used to be head hunters—point your finger at 'em and they'd die of fright."

"Wait until I'm gone, and then have a try at it," Westgaard suggested grimly.

Simpson, waiting to help the girl into the vehicle, turned on the taller, older man.

"You're trying to make it look as if you know a lot, aren't you?" he asked. "For weeks we haven't seen anything more worthwhile than roasted ducks and pork. And—"

"Yes, that's all you saw," said Westgaard. "Get in your rickshaw and we'll start."

The A-I man had not meant it as an order; he was only ending what might prove disagreeable, and trying to avoid argument.

"You talk like a fool," young Simpson said unpleasantly. "Everything you say's bull. Here's your chance to prove it. Ora, you've said that there might be something to Westgaard's hot air. See if you can find anything exciting in pork!"

The girl flushed for Westgaard and, turning, said—

"Show me what you meant, Mr. Westgaard—"

"And come back to the ship sadder and no wiser," Simpson snapped. "I'll not wait any longer. My throat feels like a bake oven, and the water's runnin' out of my shoes; I've got to hoist a couple or I'll pass out. If you want to see things, Ora, you'll have to do it with Father Goose. We're on our way."

It was Westgaard, however, who gave the order which sent the coolies back to the waterfront where the *ten Broeck's* tender waited.

"Now," said Ora Cairnes, "you've got Willis on his ear."

"I think you're the one who did that." Westgaard grinned.

"He takes a lot for granted," the girl said vaguely. "Now, you've got to make up a good yarn to bring back with us. Pearls, perhaps. Knives. Rescued maidens. Think hard, Mr. Westgaard, or I'll be horsed to death." She walked toward the nearest shop, Westgaard close behind, and the villagers moved aside to let her pass. "Here," she went on, "we have some perfectly bee-yoo-tiful ducks, and in that tub we have—we have—have—"

She was staring into the tub of meat.

"That's it," Westgaard agreed quietly. "I wondered if you'd see it."

"It's—it's—"

"Hold hard," Westgaard said, his voice assuringly firm. "Don't keep looking at it. Pick up an orange, and I'll ask the price in a minute; we'll do some questioning later. Yes, that's a finger. A native's, from the color. And the meat's the same. The small pots you see—put the orange down and pick up another one—contain flesh and bones boiled down to jelly."

The white faced girl obeyed Westgaard's orders mechanically; her face, he saw, was masked only with the greatest of effort, and so he began to talk quietly again, certain that none of the villagers understood English, certain also that the one way to keep the girl controlled was to speak casually and without evasion about the thing which must have shocked her cold.

"There's nothing new about this, Miss Cairnes. A few years ago, when I happened to be in Amoy, they were selling—er—this sort of flesh right in the regular markets. Brought it over from Formosa. The Chinese buy it when they can. They've a superstition, especially the Cantonese, who are a blood thirsty lot,

that the eating of savage meat gives them strength and courage. During the outbreak of '91, before my time, a good many hundredweights were sold. Sort of vengeance, perhaps. The Formosans were the most savage of head hunters. They still are, whether the passengers of the *ten Broeck* laughed at my stories about them or not. They prefer the heads of Chinese, but will take those of domesticated natives, or from other tribes, or those of the Japanese."

A rather weary bitterness entered Westgaard's voice as he went on deliberately—

"When I was telling you people yesterday about the heads I saw, when I was up in the hill country after camphor, you thought it a great joke."

The girl turned and faced him.

"That was yesterday," she said, clearly enough, but with the cadence of terror in her voice.

Westgaard was sorry that he had let her stay.

"Look here," he said. "I'll get hold of some Japanese official and have him come out and confiscate the stuff. We can take the finger back with us. Will that give you a good enough yarn? But we'd better buy a few of these oranges." He clattered into Chinese, and the shopkeeper immediately placed ten of the rough skinned fruit in a basket for them. "Now we'll be on our way."

"I want to find out how, why, all about it."

Westgaard said disgustedly—

"Isn't it a good story the way it is?"

And then the girl surprised him.

"I don't care about taking a story back with me. But I do want to know about—strange places."

For no more reason than that, the gaunt brown A-I man felt warmth flood into his cheeks. How long had it been since a white girl had talked to him other than as a servant of the Asiatic-Import, or as a guide, or as an old man? He thought, without intending to, that he probably owned as much stock in the A-I as Simpson did; for years almost all of his salary had stayed with the organization, and the Old Man himself wrote him from the States asking about matters.

Westgaard looked down at the eager, half frightened girl, black haired, black eyed, small and slender, and said gently:

"We mustn't stay here, Miss Cairnes. I'll think it over. Don't look at the basket, please. We mustn't let the Chinos think we know what's in it."

A hundred feet down the squalid street the girl's ease returned, and she began to invent tales ending in the discovery of the severed forefinger; Westgaard listened soberly, eyes apparently only on the river which they were approaching, where hundreds of ducks swam about, tended by boys carrying long poles. The girl's laugh became more natural, and she said—

"If the truth were known, I'll bet that finger was made out of clay, or *papier-mâché*, and—"

"You must do two things in the Orient," Westgaard said. "Imagine and use your eyes. Where," he asked the darkening river as much as the girl, "did our rickshaws vanish?"

"You sent them back."

"No; I kept two for us."

Her hand came instantly to his arm.

"Next, Miss Cairnes, let me try an experiment. Please don't speak for a moment, and see what you hear."

At first the girl heard nothing save her own footsteps and Westgaard's and, somewhere in the distance, the Oriental whine of a voice accompanied by some three stringed instrument; next she heard what Westgaard had both heard and sensed—a ceaseless cat step behind them. Her tightening fingers on his arm gave Westgaard sufficient sign of understanding.

"And last of all," the white man said, "I'm going to turn around and see if I can get a peek at whoever's so interested in us. Just keep walking along and talking. About anything. I'll turn now—"

Westgaard whirled about, but if he hoped to surprise his pursuer before the other disappeared, he was mistaken, for the fat Chinese walked calmly past him with never a glance and continued placidly along the street. Men and women

squatted before their huts; back at the shop Chinese stood haggling about the baskets, buying for the evening meal. There was no one else close enough to have been following them.

THE GIRL'S fears dissolved, and she said to Westgaard:

"The worst thing that Chinaman ever did was to mix up somebody's laundry." Her relief was indicated doubly as she continued, "I think you've been trying to frighten me, and you certainly did a great job. The finger. The vanished rickshaws—you told 'em to go when I wasn't looking. Somebody following us! Now I'm going to go back and get that finger, and I'll bet it's a fake. I've stood up for you a dozen times, but Will was right. You've just been—"

"Before you return to the shop," Westgaard suggested quietly, "take a look at the message your laundryman left for us. Then, if you want to go back, I'll go with you."

She followed his eyes with her own. On the ground, just where the calm, greasy Chinese had passed, lay a long bladed knife.

"You told the Chinaman in the shop to pull that gag," Ora Cairnes said. "You can't fool me with that sort of business!" She laughed shortly, and added, "Or are you trying to give me a good story to take back?"

"No," Westgaard said soberly. "I'm just wishing you were on the ship, story or not."

Something in his voice moved her, although she shrugged a shoulder.

"Anyhow, I'm going to take the knife back. That's a memento of our stroll."

Before Westgaard could stop her, she had stooped swiftly and picked up the long bladed weapon. Even while she was straightening up, Westgaard seized her and jerked her away from where the knife had been; one of the girl's hands went against Westgaard in violent protest; the other, with curious and newborn instinct, was flung up to her face.

"Leave me alone," she said swiftly, and, with the same breath, "What sort of bug was that?"

"Somebody threw a knife," Westgaard told her. "Keep walking. When you picked up the knife, it meant to the Chinese that you—oh, accepted their dare. Walk faster. As soon as we reach the corner, we're going to run."

Only half convinced, the girl said hotly:

"You're making a fool of me. I'm not going to run just because you've staged a play for my benefit." She walked less rapidly. "A dozen blocks away there are electric lights and cinemas and Japanese policeman and—"

"I wish there were one of 'em here," Westgaard snapped. "If you don't run, Miss Cairnes, I'm going to carry you. Don't act like a child. Glance to one side, either side, and tell me what you see."

"Chinese men. They're all coming out into the street, but—"

Westgaard, thoroughly frightened and honestly afraid, let the girl have what he felt as brutally as he could put it.

"I don't know what it's all about, except that you and I have been talking too much and walking too slowly. All they'll do is to knife me, but you're dark and slight and sing-song girls bring good prices. Now, you little fool, will you run when we get to the corner—*if* we get to the corner?"

She nodded, and Westgaard heard her catch breath painfully.

Westgaard forced himself to remember what was in the other passage, reached at the corner. A temple; he remembered that much. More, it was detached from the nearby huts and shops, as almost all temples were. Did it stand at the intersection with a third street running past it on the far side? If that were so, which of the two available streets —the one they were on being the third— would be the better to run along? Which would bring them most rapidly to the Japanese section of the town?

"Now," said Westgaard briefly, "run!"

Cries, venomous, shrill, rose behind them. A stone whizzed over their heads. Westgaard still hoped that all the Chi-

nese wished was to get the foreigners away; if that were so they would merely be harried for a street or two, and then allowed to keep running. But would the Chinese be afraid that the matter would be reported to the Japanese overlords? Westgaard decided swiftly that even this would be less damaging to the Orientals than to have the *ten Broeck* report that two passengers were missing. What, however, did the Chinese know about the vessel, and what, doubly, did the passengers on the boat know about the particular street where the pair had last been or where they might have gone later?

All of this, and more, swam before him as he ran easily. As they rounded the corner and the tile roofed temple was close enough to touch, Westgaard turned once and saw how close the chase was. Those Chinese who were in the rear kept up their din, but the nearer runners, barefoot, had made no sound as they closed in.

Westgaard's eyes gave him their position in a flash. There was the street which ran along the front of the temple and which jogged again several hundred feet nearer the Japanese district; there was also a street which bordered the temple laterally to that which they had just left. The Chinese could not know which one had been taken, and must, for a moment, either decide or divide forces. Without hesitation Westgaard picked the girl up and leaped the three steps to the wide door of the temple; his shoulder against the massive wood let him in, and then they were in darkness. In another instant he could hear the nasal voices outside, but did not dare to stop and listen; with the girl still in his arms he walked ahead in the black room, tripping once and almost falling headlong before his eyes became adjusted to the gloom. To have attempted to fasten the great door behind him would have been immediate proof to their pursuers; the thing to do was to find some hiding place which the superstitious Chinese would not ferret out.

"Will they come in?" Westgaard heard the girl ask fearfully.

"Not yet. Later." Westgaard put her down. What he said next almost completely unnerved his companion. "D'you know," the white man said harshly, "you're the first—the only—girl I ever held in my arms?"

Her voice came to him very low, broken, perhaps, by her laboring lungs.

"You mean that now you're terribly afraid, aren't you?"

"I don't mean anything except that this is serious," Westgaard said.

Since they were where they were, and the situation might easily turn out to be even worse, the white man said gravely enough:

"You know what I mean. I just wanted you to know—" he paused and changed the meaning by adding— "that I want to get you back to the ship."

In the little pause they heard the wild cries from the street, fainting down as the Chinese must have continued their chase along the two ways. Westgaard realized that he did not dare attempt escape in the direction they had come; the only thing to do was to remain until night in the sanctuary of the temple, if it proved to be that. Then, perhaps—

A strange temple!

THEIR eyes showed them, dimly, bright Chinese demon propitiating lanterns hanging from the heavily beamed roof. Long scarlet silk banners on which black and gold characters were painted, blended in the dark with the dull woodwork of the walls. On a teak table, before which slender benches were arranged, were little gilded gods and devils and lacquered goddesses. Over the table was a silver gong—all Chinese. But, strangest of all, almost at their feet was a low stand on which there stood only a shining steel mirror, with an accompanying lamp burning with a flame no larger than the glow of a cigaret.

"Chinese—but Shinto also," Westgaard muttered, drawing the girl toward the side of the chamber as he searched for a hiding place.

"*Gudzu gudzu suru to, tochiu de hi ga*

kukeru yo," very gently, made man and woman stop. "If you loiter here, you will not be able to return to your inn until it is dark. And this is not a good street when it is dark."

Westgaard, motionless save his eyes, picked out one image ranged along the wall which seemed more human than the rest, and addressed it in Japanese:

"*O kiku ni iremasu* . . . I will tell you, O honorable priest; only when the streets are dark will it be safe for us."

"If you will turn around, you can see me," the old voice chuckled. "I am over here; it is a favorite place of mine."

On the opposite side of the room Westgaard saw, dimly, four figures. The first gesticulated fiercely; the folds of its draperies seemed to flutter in the wind. The next, with pagoda sleeves and an old woman head upon a masculine body, prayed with clasped hands and compressed lips and a truly sublime expression; its glass eyes were fixed with a penetrating, lifelike gaze. The third figure was half naked, fleshless and haggard, with a rag bound about the head; it was all white lacquer, and seemed to rest upon a wooden club. The last, nearest the stand with the mirror and lamp, was seated with a rosary in its hand, and it, Westgaard saw finally, was really an ancient Japanese priest, although it moved no more than the figures of lacquer and wood.

"It is a very good place, too," the old man said. "I see who comes, and am not seen myself. Until there are more Japanese in this section of the village, few come to this temple. It was hoped that by leaving the devils and lanterns of the Chinese they might come, and I would be able to convince them that our eight thousand gods are of more importance than legendary dragons, but that has not happened. And so I wait. I am very old; I will not need to wait much longer. I also am talkative, and it would seem that there are things to be done. *Mah!* Those yellow men were angry when they missed you; they will come back and then will enter the temple—and what will you do?"

Westgaard frowned, then said quietly—"Could you hide the *jini-san* somewhere?"

"There is only my sleeping room," the priest answered, never shifting a muscle as he sat. "And they will certainly go there. It is too bad that the god of this temple is only the god of pestilence; if he were that of cleverness, I would pray to him for a solution, but as it is—*hai!* What have you to suggest, *danna-san?*"

Westgaard's eyes roved somberly about the dim chamber and saw not even an alcove in which the girl might crouch.

At last he said:

"The *jini-san* must go to your room, and when the Chinese come, I will talk to them a little. And when they are all in here, she must try to run down the street and—"

"There will be heads sticking out of every doorway," objected the ancient. "It is only a good plan in that I should enjoy seeing a bit of fighting, but it would never work. What else can you suggest?"

"I can bar the door, and you could go as rapidly as you can for help."

The priest said softly:

"I sit, my son, because I can no longer stand. I only am able to drag myself along the floor." Then very gently, "I have not walked for many years. The savages in the hills caught me and cut every muscle in my legs. You must think of something more practical. Ask the *jini-san;* you and I think only of death and fighting; she may have a more sensible plan."

"The priest tells me that there is no place to hide," Westgaard said to Ora. "I've suggested waiting until the Chinese crowd in here, and that you try running toward the Japanese district, but he says it won't work. Have you any idea of what might?"

"It's so impossible," she said shakily. "A few blocks away people are going to see the movies and eating ice cream, and here—"

Here, all three realized, less and less time remanied for them to decide what might be done. Already voices were be-

ginning to hum outside this temple of two faiths. Westgaard, automatically, pulled out a cigaret and lighted a match; the priest warned him sharply that the Chinese would certainly detect the odor of foreign tobacco, and then said, in a sharper tone than before:

"Light another match, my son. So. Hold it before your face."

The old man peered at the lean, almost haggard face of the white man, in which blue eyes, cold as glass, returned the gaze.

"*Iko to omoul*" the priest muttered. "It might fool them. Off with your coat—your shirt—the other shirt also. Do not argue with me, but now tear a strip from the shirt! In the name of all the gods and the devils of these Chinese also, will you hurry? Bind the rag about your head, my son and light another match. Hold it close! *Ai-ya!* It is not a miracle, but it is close to one! Now look at—no, tell the *jini-san* to do it; tell her to observe yourself, and then to examine the *Amatsu mika hoshi*, the star god, the dread scarecrow male of heaven. He is white lacquer and his eyes stare like bits of the sky! What does she say?"

Before Westgaard could ask, Ora Cairnes said tremulously:

"If we weren't—if there weren't the Chinese outside I'd laugh. You look like that god."

"She agrees with you, honorable priest."

The fiery but crippled priest whipped aside every one of Westgaard's objections, and the white man knew at the end that there was no better, no other, plan. It might work, since the priest had fooled the Chinese by sitting immobile along with the figures of the gods, and there was nothing else he could suggest.

"Now, carry the star god back of the altar, my son, and return with the great incense burner, the lotus. It is as large as a barrel, almost, and brass. Bring it here."

Westgaard concealed the star god as best he could behind the altar and brought back an enormous brass lotus.

"Next—*mah!* My head is old and I forget. Go through that door in the far wall. It is the only one; you can find it by running your hand along the wood. You will be in my sleeping chamber. There is my bed, and my *hibachi* with no coals in it, and a cabinet with four drawers. In the upper one you will find a jeweled headdress; bring it. Once a great Japanese lady presented it to me for—what matter now? Open the last drawer and you will find a bolt of black silk, from which some day I will have a robe made. And a white one also, to make my burial gown. Bring them both, and hurry."

When Westgaard returned the sound of voices had grown louder, and the priest remarked that an argument was going on, which would only result in these thieves' and robbers' searching the temple and making off with whatever was small enough to slip inside their jackets.

"They have no idea of religion," he snarled. "Now, the *jini-san* must take off her hat and upper garments, and I will tell you how to drape her. And her shoes, of course."

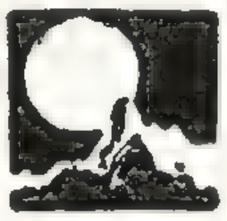
"D'you think—"

"I am too old to think," the priest told him briefly.

"You're next," Westgaard said to the silent girl. "Sorry, but it's the only chance we have, Miss Cairnes."

She looked at Westgaard's naked chest and then said, more nearly calm than at any time since she had been in the temple—

"How much, Mr. Westgaard?"



NIGHT had fallen while they had been in the temple; somewhere in the Japanese district a bronze bell called priests to evening prayer. In the temple of double faiths all seemed sleeping, save that from time to time the ancient priest, seated before the altar, stroked a smaller bell gently. *Ting-ting-ting!* One taper burned before him, throwing the chamber into even greater darkness than before and sending long black shadows across the polished black floor, ink on ebony. Lacquers and brasses, near the taper, gleamed, and the

long strips of silk flashed out the gold of the lettering.

The old priest sang a low, weary, uniform chant in a quavering voice, with abrupt cadences, with guttural breaks and repetitions, with a monotony which lulled and hypnotized; from time to time he dropped fresh incense into a burner, struck the little bell gently—*ting!*—and, more than once, turned so he could observe the figures ranged against the wall: the gesticulating thunder god, Kaminari; Asuha, with his praying hands and feminine face; the blue eyed, haggard star god, also called the scarecrow of the sky (whose eyes winked no more now than when they had been truly of blue glass!); and next, lily on the lotus, a goddess who sat with downcast eyes and lowered head, lest flickering lids betray her, a goddess wrapped about in fold on fold of black and ivory silk, and who seemed—perhaps it was the flickering candlelight—to sway slightly, as wood and ivory and lacquer would never have done.

From under the robe a bare foot had been slipped, the toes of which touched the brass insides of the lotus flower. A glass jeweled headdress weighed the proud head down, as a Kwannon's—goddess of mercy—might have properly been bowed; under the headdress were again folds of black silk, making the face more lacquer-like and unnatural.

With a bit of charcoal from the priest's brazier Westgaard had penciled Ora Cairnes' lashes; her own rouge had been used to make her lips thin and Oriental. She sat on the lower half of the lotus incense burner, silent, obviously steeling herself for the immobility and motionless ordeal which would come soon.

Never changing his voice from the monotonous chant, the old priest sang:

"It will be better to relax, my children. Time enough to imitate the gods when these yellow fiends enter, which, from the noise they make, will not be long. The rats are all out of their holes this night! And it is almost time you told me why, my son."

Westgaard said softly—

"I saw a finger in a tub of meat, and I am afraid that they knew I saw it."

"Is it so?" the priest asked, bending over the *shintai* of the mirror, and expecting no answer. "Is it so?" He chanted a dozen lines without error before asking, "A large finger, I suppose, my son, belonging, perhaps, to a savage Formosan warrior who ventured too near the Chinese on a head hunting expedition?"

"Small. Probably that of a little native."

A third time the ancient repeated:

"Is it so?" And then, unaccountably, "I am very lonely here—now."

Westgaard was too full of the coming trial, which might end horribly for both him and his companion, to catch the emphasis of the last word of the priest; more, the old man began to talk instantly, as if he had said too much.

"Well, here we have two white people playing at being gods. This is one time, my son, when you will admit that many gods are better than one. I have never understood the way you reason. You say that the same god who makes flowers and women and fruits also makes ugly and wicked things, such as murderers and tigers and snakes and the fleas. Think of beings who make fleas! Now, the way we figure it, the gods have never repented of making fleas, but keep right on making them; they are really very busy at it.

"I would have supposed that divine beings could have found something more useful, or more congenial, than making fleas. But no, fleas must be made, and well, too, just to plague humanity. How, I ask, can man have much in common with the god of fleas? Is it not most rational to have a separate and distinct divinity for insects? Fleas are just one of those evils in which gods indulge, for the benefit of others. I can not for the life of me see how the god of blossoms and sunshine can also be the god of fleas."

On and on the aged old voice droned, now pausing to recite a few lines of the litany, now gabbling again about inconsequential things; it became more and more difficult to hear him, for the exterior

sounds were growing, harsh, argumentative, violent, as party after party of the pursuing Chinese reported failure, where failure should have been impossible.

Westgaard, without moving his head, said quietly to the girl:

"Relax all you can. Don't let your muscles get cramped. The Chinese may not come in, but they are talking about it now. And if we don't fool them, the priest ought to get word to the authorities tomorrow."

"But tonight?"

"That's one danger from this masquerade. In your robes, Miss Cairnes, you look almost Oriental, and—"

"In stories," Ora Cairnes said, head still bowed, "the hero always gives the girl a gun to use when all hopes have fled."

"I haven't a gun, and I'm not a hero," Westgaard told her. He moved the heavy club a bit, and his fingers, tightening their grasp, whitened at the knuckles. "I'm just a fool; I shouldn't have pointed out that finger in the tub."

"We plagued you until you did. Even now I can't believe things are as serious as they must be. Why, the gang are prob'ly watching Will shake up Martinis or Bacardis, laughing at us, and—"

"Quiet," Westgaard cautioned.

Up went the old priest's voice, higher, in his chant; his face seemed serene, unruffled by any earthly emotion; he bowed, struck the little bell, continued his prayers.

The candle flame flared, flickered and flared anew as the heavy door was pushed open, and Chinese pushed and shuffled into the temple, clear to where the Japanese priest huddled at his invocations; they chattered and whispered, but as the still air of the temple, and the presence of gods and devils, the rising incense and burning taper, worked on their senses, they became quiet. The leader, a heavily built Chinese with a scar running from his cheek clear across the bridge of his nose, may have been impressed also, but he spoke almost instantly—

"Withered and brown ape," he said, "where are the white man and woman?"

The priest finished the last lines of the many Words of Perfume, struck the bell once more and then turned slowly.

"I am only a priest," he said. "I am not a prophet. What white people, my son?"

"Those who came here. Where are they?"

The priest answered question with question—

"Why should foreigners come to such a poor temple as this?"

"That is none of your affair, old man." To a squat, evil faced companion, "Go to his room, F'ong, and some of the rest go with him, lest the devil be armed. But do not hurt the girl. And—" addressing the kneeling ancient again— "for hiding them, you will pay."

"As my temple boy paid?" the priest asked.

The Chinese leader's open palm sent the old man sprawling on the floor. Had any eyes at that moment been watching the star god, all white lacquer and gold, blue eyes and bandaged head, they would have seen that he moved as no image can move, and then became motionless again as the priest, staring upward, said gently:

"You are a very brave man, Wong Chi. The gods will write that down in their book of records, and it will give you much credit when you go to them in the dragon cart."

Since the Chinese were listening, Wong Chi said grimly—

"Your temple boy is missing, old fool; what happened to me for that?"

The priest sighed.

"Nothing," he admitted, "nothing, yet."

"That boy will talk no more about your eight million gods and devils, nor trouble me about them when I am about my business!"

"No," the old man agreed softly. "Not he. But there are always ghosts."

Wong Chi laughed loudly, and the other Chinese tittered; the leader's face

darkened as F'ong and a half dozen companions returned empty handed.

"Where have you hidden them?" he snarled.

"You are so very wise, my son, wiser than the gods, that I tremble lest I attempt to advise you. But—well, there was my room, and there is this. The best way to find something is to search."

Wong Chi thought this over briefly, and came to the conclusion that the priest intended.

"You mean they're gone."

"Make what you will of it."

THE CHINESE pushed his way through the smelling throng fiercely. He stalked back of the altar, kicked the true image of the star god from sheer pique, upturned benches, tore down a hanging which could not possibly have hidden anything save a sheet of paper, returned to the row of images and glared at them angrily, pushing the thunder god to see how far it stood from the wall and how heavy it was, stared once at the downcast, crowned head of the goddess of mercy as if even the image of a woman attracted him, and—while Westgaard's heart beat faster and faster, and his fingers froze to the club—finally said:

"There is a little garden. Some of you tear it apart, and see what you see. F'ong, you stay with me. There may be a hidden place of which this man of gods knows, and we will get it out of him."

"If we can not find them?" some one asked.

"Go to your homes and, if they have managed to get away and the Japanese apes come asking questions, we have not even seen any white people!"

"But if you find the girl, Wong Chi?"

Wong Chi permitted himself a leer.

"I promised her to you—tomorrow. Does that satisfy you? And the white man's gold—all foreigners have much gold about them—will be divided equally."

When the room was empty of all save the priest and the two Chinese, the old man said sadly—

"What now, my son—what now?"

"Now," said the Chinese, "you are going to talk."

"You have not been a bandit, and expert at discovering where money is hidden, all these years for nothing?"

"I come and go." Wong Chi giggled. "Your monkey police look for me, but I am not to be found. And why? Because my friends love me."

"Or fear you."

"Are you afraid of me?"

The old priest righted a fold in his robe.

"No," he said. "I am not afraid of you at all."

"The gods will save you, eh?"

"Yes," the Japanese admitted. "At least one of them will."

Westgaard changed his grip on the club a trifle.

"Six years ago," Wong Chi began, beckoning to F'ong to get on the far side of the priest, "you came to this village with your talk of gods. You have annoyed me many times, old man. I have been lenient. I thought that when your temple boy disappeared you would get some sense. Do you think I do not know who has told the policeman who comes here at daybreak to pray what is going on here? Do you think I am a fool?"

Here the priest nodded, and Wong Chi whipped himself into a frenzy.

"Why, four officers walked past the shop where your boy's flesh was sold, and when one of them saw the finger, he said, 'At your old tricks of catching the head hunters?' and the shopkeeper told him how the head hunters had seized your boy while he was in the hills playing, and how we had revenged him! Do you think such fools can catch Wong Chi?" And, for the pleasure of it, he kicked the old man fervently.

"What has all that got to do with white people?" the priest said coldly.

"Only this. We are sick of your monkey tricks. They could not have escaped, and so they came here, and here they are, concealed somewhere."

"So you ridded yourself of the others,

intending to enjoy the woman yourself?"

"That is the first sensible thing you have said in a long time. Now, where are they? If you agree to say nothing, we will not hurt you."

"I may promise, but suppose I tell the tale to Kagomura, the officer, in the morning?" Then quietly, for all his old heart was pounding, "A lost temple boy is of no importance, but foreigners, being missing, will cause this village to be pulled apart in the search."

"And even then they will not find Wong Chi. Now—" bringing a knife from nowhere and holding the point before the ancient's eyes—"where are the man and the girl?"

"They have been changed into gods and goddesses, for all I know," the priest told him.

"Stay with him, F'ong, while I show him what his gods are worth," Wong Chi said heatedly, convinced entirely that the whites were no longer in the temple, if they had ever been there, and not wanting to announce failure to the Chinese whom he ruled by terror.

Wong Chi, the candlelight making his face horrible and sinister, strode to the gesticulating thunder god; he was about to crash the image to the floor, when light from the jewels on the crown of mercy caught his eye.

"Women first, always." He grinned, and took the three or four steps which brought him in front of the girl on the lotus.

"A very good piece of work." He snickered. "I wish I had lived in the days when this goddess was alive."

His thick palm barely pressed against skin; he had time only for a grunt of surprise, when Westgaard's club flashed up and hammered down on the braids atop Wong Chi's head. It was at best a glancing, angled blow, but it knocked the Chinese to the floor, more off balance than hurt.

Westgaard did not stop for an instant, but leaped forward. His second swing of the club was truer, and when F'ong, mouth open, eyes agape, tried to reach for his knife, Westgaard dropped him like a rock from a cliff.

It was rapid, like the zigzag of a falling star in time, but as Westgaard turned swiftly the huge Wong Chi was already on him. Westgaard smashed him once under the stabbing arm, and felt the blade take him, no more than a long scratch, across the back. Twice Westgaard drove his fist into the heavy belly so close to him, and twice Wong Chi grunted with pain, writhing to get away and to slash the white man at the same time. Only this saved Westgaard in that moment, and then the Chinese, desperate as he felt another terrible blow numbing stomach, legs and head, tore himself away and, crouching, panted a few steps away.

The white man had dropped his club—there would not have been time to swing it—when Wong Chi had swarmed at him. The Chinese began to smile widely and made his blade catch the light from the taper as he made tentative slashes.

"So the white man was changed to a god?" he taunted the priest. "Well, that is not so bad, seeing that the woman was changed to a goddess and is now flesh again. Watch me kill this man, priest, and pray lest I do the same to you."

THEN there began a monotonous business, save that death was at the end of it. Westgaard slipped swiftly away from the Chinese's heavy rushes, always trying to get time enough and distance enough to grab up the club he had dropped before. Once he half stooped over it, and barely avoided Wong Chi's bellowing attack; the knife grazed his cheek as he hurled himself aside, slipped and came to his feet to sidestep another plunge. A desperate game, and for desperate stakes.

Wong Chi tried to work the lean white man into a corner. Once Westgaard was so close to Ora Cairnes that he could feel her quick breath as he passed; again and again they circled the crippled priest on the floor—a priest who muttered many words not found in the sacred books and whose old forehead glistened with

unaccustomed sweat as he endeavored to pull himself out of the way of the two intent men, lest Westgaard stumble and fall over him. He finally achieved the wall and, spitting curses, leaned against the side of the thunder god itself.

The taper flared; light and darkness and shadow, scarlet silk and gilded images, made the scene unearthly. On her lotus the girl sat; the only time she stirred—when the Chinese's back was to her and she saw Westgaard almost backed over the prostrate body of F'ong—Westgaard cried out, "Sit still! Just keep out of the way!" with an assurance he was far from feeling, and only the touch of his retreating heel against the Chinese on the floor prevented him from going backward to the black boards.

Her hands were no longer clasped loosely, nor her head bent. All of the courage and flippancy were gone now. She saw and knew that she saw things which an hour ago had seemed fable.

Round and round the two men circled, Westgaard always retreating, Wong Chi, knife ready, always advancing, ponderously, heavily, hoping that the white man might try to come close again, tasting unpleasantly the blood which dripped from his own lips. His rushes were coming oftener now and were more difficult to avoid, since he barely finished one when he started another, knife slashing always. And so the uneven game continued; it could have, Westgaard realized, only one finish. His own. Death—which, strangely, did not mean so much. He had faced it before; he was not fearful of it now. But the girl . . .

He raised his voice, speaking in English, and the words came jerkily as he spoke:

"If it doesn't look good—run to the door. Down the street! Try it—maybe no one outside now— I'll hold him—"

As he stepped away from a bull-like attack, the girl, he thought, tried to say something, but achieved only a curious little gasp.

"Remember," Westgaard told her again. "Whatever you think, run—fast. If—if—you run—the fellow may—go after you—instead of—"

Her wide eyes—he saw them almost subconsciously—told him both disbelief and terror.

"There always remain the gods," the ancient priest squealed in Japanese. "Keep away from him, O son, and try once more for the club!"

"He comes too fast," Westgaard choked out, and Wong Chi indeed was doing just that.

He never stopped now. Rush followed rush, so fierce, so fast that the white man was never given an instant's rest. Wong Chi kept him from the middle of the room now, and Westgaard slipped away with greater and greater difficulty as the Chinese tried to pin him against the wall where the idols stood; so close was a rush that only by dropping to his knees did the white man miss the swinging knife.

It could not last much longer. Well, the thing to do if Wong Chi kept him hemmed was to leap at the Chinese, try to smash at the knife with left hand and arm, and then close in. What would happen next Westgaard could guess well enough.

The old priest was no longer cursing the Chinese, but his own strength and age and condition. His arms were wrapped about the feet of the thunder god; inch by inch he drew himself up, until he stood beside the wooden figure; then his old eyes took fire and he watched more closely.

Wong Chi started one of his rushes and, just as Westgaard pivoted, the huge Chinese stopped instead of attempting to continue ahead, whirled heavily also, and had Westgaard sidewise to him. Up went the knife, and Wong Chi jumped forward. At the same instant the old priest, legs braced against the wall, shoved with all his power; priest and image fell forward across the Chinese's plunging knees, and Westgaard, turning in midair, was atop all of them, hands groping for Wong Chi's knife arm. The white man wrested the blade away before he realized that the Chinese was making no attempt to stop him.

"You see?" the ancient priest screamed. "I told you the gods always remained!"

The sharp brass fingers of the thunder god had driven through the wall of Wong Chi's chest as surely as any knife, and Wong Chi's cleverness could not assist his torn heart.

DAWN blushed and day brightened in the harbor of Kokoshiru. Bamboo rafts with sunlit sails of woven matting slipped down the river. Tottering women on their bound feet—golden lilies—idly watched other women, quite as brightly clad, swish clothing against rocks on the bank; watched also a white man and white woman clamber into a *catamaran* and be paddled to the foreign ship, which reflected whitely in the blue water, while a Japanese policeman waved to them from the shore.

Laughter and a dozen questions greeted Ora Cairnes and Westgaard as they stepped to the *ten Broeck's* deck—

"You're a fine pair—"

"Who says they haven't night clubs in Formosa?"

"Vampin' Ora and the pride of the Orient!"

"Not a souvenir between them! What were you doin' all night?"

While Ora Cairnes shook off teasing hands and Westgaard tried to duck away without success, the girl thought of this white man who had sat all night watching the barred door of the temple, who had imitated Wong Chi's voice when villagers called and had told them to return to their homes and sleep. She thought of the little Japanese officer who had come in the early morning and clucked at the bound F'ong and the dead Wong Chi and who, after listening to the priest's solemn tale, had escorted them to the shore. She thought of all this and more, although all she said was:

"When did any of you need chaperoning? Who d'you think you are—a bunch of Queen Victoria's ladies in waiting? Don't be sil', the lot of you."

Young Simpson turned to Westgaard.

"You ought to have more sense," he said sharply. "Sightseein's well enough, but you should have brought Miss Cairnes back to the ship by dark."

Westgaard said briefly:

"Sorry. Couldn't be helped."

"You're darn' right you'll be sorry," the other cried. "If you think I'm not going to have this reported to your company— What did you say?"

"You heard what I said," the gaunt A-I man told him. Suddenly he was sick of the whole affair. "I'm going to get some sleep," he said shortly, and turned away.

Simpson's father looked curiously at Westgaard, but said nothing.

"I suppose you had a lot of adventures," his son went on, half ashamed, his eyes on the girl. "Surrounded by savages, and you couldn't get back—"

Soberly, trying to catch Westgaard's eye, Ora Cairnes only said—

"Well, we saw a temple and—"

"It was so very interesting you stayed all night there, listening to Westgaard tell where the idols came from! You've frightened us, let me tell you. Perhaps you think it's funny."

"Not funny at all." Westgaard came to the girl's assistance. "If we told you, I doubt if you'd believe it."

"You're right, I wouldn't! It may be a joke to you, Ora, but trottin' around with an old man who's always lived in the Orient—"

Simpson senior said hastily:

"Hush, Willis! Don't act like an utter ass."

Westgaard saw how young the other was; he smiled gravely, bowed and started to walk away. Ora's voice came to him clearly:

"I'll be on deck as soon as I've changed. There are some things I want to ask—" and Westgaard bowed a second time.

His clothes, as were the girl's, were rumpled. He was very tired as he took them off and splashed water on face and head; the mirror just above him told how tired he was.

He looked into it gravely. A gaunt face.

Lined. A little scar where a Korean blade had once nicked him. Gray at the temples. Tired eyes. Old.

Better if the girl did not tell the story; they would never believe it. Did they not say that the Orient was like any other place? If she told what had happened they would be sure that she had been philandering and would laugh the more; she must let them think whatever they wished—and laugh herself.

Strange places . . .

A cigaret between his fingers, grave as ever, Westgaard went on deck at last and sat down beside Simpson's father. He smoked until the tobacco coals burned his fingertips and then said quietly—

"It couldn't be helped."

"I know. Don't tell me if you don't wish. My son's a young fool, but he's in love."

Westgaard almost said—

"So am I." But he kept silence.

Strange places, and old. Adventure and romance in dim passages and foreign streets; palms in the hills and pearl fishers on the water—but old. Westgaard thought of Ora's hand in his own as they followed the Japanese policeman out of the temple of two faiths, of the bent head and bared breast as she sat in the brass lotus as the goddess of mercy. Mercy! That would be it, if she said she loved him; that, and gratitude.

The girl walked quickly along the deck with young Simpson at her side:

"Come along," she said gaily. "You and I must—"

The gaunt A-I man said quietly—

"No." Just that, but the girl's face flamed and then grew very white.

Before Westgaard was aware of her intent, she came where he was sitting, bent and kissed him. More, she pressed her cheek against his; her hand touched his hair, and Westgaard, who had meant to say nothing, said—

"Goodby, dear."

He was so afraid that she was crying, or that she might protest, that he almost pushed her away as he said harshly to the elder Simpson:

"Now, you take a medium sized camphor tree, and it should yield fifty *piculs* of crystalized camphor, marketable at about fifteen hundred yen or more. The trees mature and produce more rapidly here than elsewhere, and—"

As his voice trailed off, and he kept his eyes resolutely from the puzzled ones of the girl, Simpson, keen man, took up the thread with—

"And the old trees—"

Westgaard reached for another cigaret.

"When they're old, they're just old."

He paused, never looking up. Down the deck a dozen of the *ten Broeck's* youthful party were arguing whether to swim now or later, and soon Ora Cairnes' clear voice joined in the momentous discussion.

"You've seen more of things than I have," Simpson said softly. "Korea, Formosa, the uncivilized North Japan, China, Siberia; you've done a lot of things, Westgaard; they sound impossible. That's why these children hardly believe the stories they've heard about you. The girls are impressed, but hate to admit it. Ora Cairnes—oh, well, we'll sail tomorrow, eh? Yes, you've seen a lot of strange things in strange places. You're lucky, however. They might have ended badly for you."

Westgaard watched Ora Cairnes, arm in arm with another girl, run for her swimming suit. He remembered what the mirror had shown him, but could not help saying, although so casually that Simpson did not stare at him—

"Yes, that's right, but a fellow never really knows what is good for him—nor for others."

He believed now that Ora Cairnes would never forget, as he never could, the scarlet silks and flaring taper and images in the little temple presided over by the crippled old Japanese priest. She would not need to stay—in gratitude—beside a man with graying hair, but she would never forget. Westgaard smiled slowly and stood up; he went to the rail, where the youngsters were diving. Ora Cairnes waved to him as she flashed from the side of the ship, and Westgaard, smiling, held his hand high to her.

The MASTER *of the* CONJURERS' GUILD

A Mystery of Gay Vienna

By JOSEPH SZEBENYEI

AT 11:25 P.M. on that Saturday night in the press room of police headquarters in Vienna, we were playing cards as usual. By 11:30 each and every one of us had to report to the night editor over the phone, "Last call; nothing new." The forms closed at 11:40. If there happened to be some trifling item, we gave a hurried recital of the main facts, so that a few lines might appear about it in the morning issues. These were usually some minor suicide or some burglary somewhere in the city.

On that memorable Saturday night the police lieutenant, who was in charge of the press room and who handed us the releases, entered at 11:35, just as we were about to close the card game and adjourn to a more lively locality over the Ronacher Orpheum. We looked at him inquiringly.

"Anything new?"

"Yes," he said. "Something quite unusual."

We gathered around him and listened to the most amazing story I have ever heard. He told it in a hurried, spasmodic

manner in short sentences and watched our surprised faces as we looked aghast at one another and refused to believe it. We were a hard boiled lot of boys and men, some of us well advanced in years, veterans of the police press room, who were accustomed to weird things happening around us. Yet the unprecedented queerness of the story we were listening to took us by surprise. It sounded too mysterious to be accepted on the face of it in the matter-of-fact surroundings where any mysterious case was usually limited to some murder where the clues eluded the jovial detectives assigned to it. As a rule they were a sleepy crowd and would only wake up to the importance of some case when it happened to involve some member of the royal family or the government.

"It happened at the Imperial Opera House," he began. "The Archduchess Stephanie and her two escorts, Duke Branderdorff and Count Eszterhazy, the two court chamberlains, occupied the royal box. Just opposite their box there sat Baron Krondheim, the famous bank president, and the Baroness Krondheim. The baroness was wearing earrings with a single pearl in each. This was the first time she had had them on. The baron had brought them from India and it appears he had paid a million kronen for them. Unusually large and beautiful pearls. They were perfectly matched. Everybody gazed at them throughout the first act and people discussed them as sensational. Then during the intermission between the second and third acts, a royal lackey entered the baron's box and addressed the baroness:

"'Her Royal and Imperial Highness, the Archduchess Stephanie, would like to inspect the gems more closely. Would the Baroness be good enough to permit her to do so?'

"Baroness Krondheim took one of the earrings from her ear and handed it to the lackey. That was the last they saw of the lackey and the pearl."

"How so? And the archduchess?" we asked.

"The archduchess knew nothing about it. She had sent no messenger. It was a fake lackey. He was attired in the royal household uniform. The baron swears that the man wore the uniform of the court servants. As the archduchess sat just opposite to them, and had previously smiled at the baroness and greeted her cordially, she had certainly no reason to doubt the genuineness of the request. The archduchess is very much upset over the affair, she being the favorite granddaughter of the old emperor . . ."

Of course it was plain, as plain as ABC. The emperor must have heard of it by now and must have sent word to the police to get the man. He feared nothing more than scandal or ridicule and the case smelled of both. That a member of his family should be involved—even at a distance—in a scandal of this sort, was enough to awaken his ire. No wonder the police were on their toes and excited beyond measure. In fact, even as we listened to the story, we could not help hearing the commands in the corridors, the hurried and noisy departure of the reserves, the humming of the whole crowd within the tremendous building. Suddenly they had become alert and ambitious. Police cars were pulling up at the main entrance, the chief of police came hurriedly to take charge of the hunt, detectives were rushing out of the building in pairs and singly. Two thousand men were mobilized in a few minutes.

Baron Krondheim, the banker, was a shrewd, brainy man. The money the pearl represented meant nothing to him. He would have kept silent about the loss if he had had his choice. It was the silly simplicity of the plot that annoyed him. People would laugh at him, he surmised. He was supposed to be the brains of Austrian finance, the genius, who had attained his present position by cunning and by sheer brain power. And some petty thief had come along and made him look like a fool.

We rushed to see him, but he would say nothing. He sent word by his valet that the matter was in the hands of the

police and that they would give us all the information there was to give. He had nothing to say. Anyhow, we had nearly forty-eight hours, for the story was too late for the Sunday papers, and on Mondays the dailies did not come out. Sunday was our day off. We retreated to the usual night haunt we frequented over the Ronacher Orpheum and discussed the case until four in the morning. Then we rang up the inspector of the day at headquarters. There was no development whatever. The men were out working on the case. Any clue? No, not that he was aware of.

It was noon on Sunday when we sauntered into the press room again. There were several releases on our desks, as usual. One dealt with the pearl case. It told all about it, and of the efforts the police were making to hunt down the thief. At one o'clock another release was distributed among the reporters. This is what it said:

Police Headquarters, Vienna
Press Department

At 11:30 this morning a man attired in the uniform of a captain of the state police called upon Baron Krondheim, the banker, and representing to have been sent by the chief of the state police, requested the banker to let him have the mate of the pearl earring that was stolen the night before at the Opera House. He said the chief of police needed the second pearl in order to facilitate the search for the stolen one. As the man bore a written receipt with him, the banker let him have the pearl without suspecting anything. The chief of police stated that he had not authorized any one to call for the pearl and that it is evident that the "captain of police" was the same person who by a clever trick succeeded in getting possession of the earring the night before. The investigation is being carried on.

"That takes the cake," said Baumgarten of the *Tageblatt*. "A master mind. A genius. He would deserve to get away with it. Imagine the impertinence of it. Going back for the pendant." He laughed uproariously and we all joined in.

"And he *will* get away with it. A fellow of his caliber can outwit the police of the whole world, let alone that of Vienna," remarked Gus Friedlander of the *Fremdenblatt*.

"Well, there is a reward of ten thousand kronen offered by the banker," the police lieutenant informed us. Upon the remark of Gus, that he would not buy it for a nickel, there was general and hearty laughter from the dozen reporters.

AS THE afternoon wore on and no progress was being made by the police, we found ourselves rooting for the thief. There was a pretty fair description of the man in the hands of the police. True, the "lackey" was described as six feet tall, while the "captain of police" who called for the pendant was given as five feet eight by the banker and the doorman at the mansion. But the description of the face tallied somewhat. Both had drawn, small, piercing eyes; both were described as having longish faces and hollow cheeks and both were estimated to be about fifty-five years of age. The police were convinced that it was the same person. A lone worker and a clever one.

It was to be a first page story and a long and fine one, too. We were all hard at work writing and collecting data, exchanging information, conferring with our cartel members, and hiding special information from other groups who belonged to other cartels. There was keen competition among the groups of three or four. Gus Friedlander was the star man in my group. Usually he directed the cooperative work. He came over to me and whispered:

"Go and see Master Gibbons at the Erzherzog Stephen Hotel. Tell him we want his theory on the subject."

I took my hat and walked out. Master Gibbons, in spite of his English sounding name, was a full blooded Austrian. He had been a vaudeville performer in his younger days and had adopted that name for stage purposes at the time. He still used it. He had left the stage some twenty years before, and devoted his time to inventing tricks for the use of stage conjurers. He was known as the master of the conjurers' guild. He would invent some canny trick and sell it to a conjurer or a group of them in all parts

of the world and live on the income for years, until he came forward again with some new one. It was he who invented the "levitation" trick, where a girl, lying on her back, rises in the empty air, seemingly unsupported, and slowly drops back upon the floor. It was he who first made a box three by two feet, into which he would place a girl and then pierce the box full of sharp swords, fifty of them, from all angles, and the girl would still be in the box—unharmed. It was he who invented the guillotine trick, beheading a person with a regular guillotine, the head visibly dropping from the body as the ax fell upon the victim, and the next moment one saw the conjurer replacing the head with no ill effects at all.

Most of the sensational and inexplicable conjurers' tricks were his inventions. He was a genius in solving problems and finding facts to deduce other facts from. We never failed to get his views on any major criminal case, and whatever he said was always interesting.

I found the master seated in the café of the hotel in company with a young detective. I had often seen the younger man at headquarters and immediately surmised that he, too, came to ask the advice of the master in the mysterious pearl case.

"May I join the conference?"

"Certainly, take a seat. What will you have?" asked Mr. Gibbons. "This is my nephew, George Gastein," he added.

"We have met before," I said, shaking hands with the detective. "Have you heard the latest, Master Gibbons?"

"George was just telling me about it. I was suggesting to him to go straight to Mr. Krondheim and tell him to return the pearls to his wife. It sounds like an insurance job. But George tells me that the pearls were not insured. I said, in that case, it is a family affair. The banker perhaps could not afford to spend a million kronen* for earrings, so he chose this way of getting them back from his wife."

"You don't want me to quote you on that?" I asked.

"No, of course not. I am just fooling. It's most likely, still, that that would be the first thing to suggest itself to me, if I were working on the case."

"There is certainly a great deal to it. It never occurred to me," said George.

"And it wouldn't occur to a good many others, either," said the old man with contempt in his voice. "They blow this case up into a tremendous criminal case. It's nothing of the kind. Just a clever thief. It's a bit of brain work, that's all. They have to go out and find the man. Just as in any other criminal case. They ought to have a description of him. Half a dozen people must have seen him in his two uniforms."

"Do you think he will try to leave town?" asked the detective.

"No, not with his brains. He'll just stay indoors for some time. He knows the trains and the stations are watched. He knows there is a description of him circulating all over the country. A man of his abilities stays indoors and waits. He knows that he couldn't sell the loot on this continent. He had his plans laid before he took the first step, if I am any judge of men. I am afraid they will never get him. If it was the baron who engineered the thing through an accomplice, he will deny it and will know how to hide his man. How would you prove it on him? No way. And who would think of charging him with the crime? No one. Besides, how can you charge a man with stealing his own property? You can't."

"What for publication, Master Gibbons?" I asked.

"For publication? Just say that I think this man is a great fellow whoever he may be. That he worked with brains and mathematical calculation. That he ought to be invited to join the detective bureau of the state police. That a man of his abilities should have been employed by the state and not permitted to run amok with all that genius directed against society instead of for the benefit of society. Imagine what that man could do in the way of harm, if he once got going."

I made notes of what the master said

*$200,000

and left them. Back in the press room I gave the notes to Gus and my two other pals. When I casually mentioned that George Gastein was with the master, Gus told us in a whisper that George Gastein was not the master's nephew, as he liked to call him, but his son.

It was a queer story, characteristic of Master Gibbons. The old boys, who had known him in his youth, recalled that affair of his with a vaudeville dancer, who had committed suicide some twenty years before and who had been Gibbon's assistant on the stage at the time. It was then that Gibbons retired from the stage and began inventing tricks for the profession. George Gastein was the dancers' son and—it was surmised—that of Gibbons. It was never learned why she took her own life. She was beautiful, in fact the most beautiful girl in vaudeville in Europe. She carried off the beauty contest prizes among vaudeville people every year. She was celebrated, and they whispered at the time that she had wanted to leave the conjurer and branch out in an act of her own. She played second fiddle to Gibbons in his show and her success gave her a swelled head. But Gibbons would not hear of it. So she killed herself.

Of course, this was just talk. It might have been true or it might not. At any rate, those who were close to him knew that she had a son and Master Gibbons brought him up and paid for his education. They also knew that ever since the girl died, Master Gibbons was a changed man. He never had appeared on the stage since, he was never known to associate with any other woman and lived a secluded life, studying constantly and pondering over thrilling tricks that amazed the world and set audiences gasping.

OF GEORGE GASTEIN, the young detective, some people at headquarters knew that, up to the time he entered the service, he was a drifter and a good-for-nothing. He was educated and naturally intelligent and he inherited the beauty of his mother, but nothing of the brains and genius of his father. He had tried his hand at various jobs, but was unsuccessful everywhere. It was Gibbons' influence with the higher-ups at the ministry of interior that landed him the job in the detective bureau. He had not been very successful there either. He was considered a mediocre man at detecting crime and was never given an important assignment. He was one of those fellows who would hold his position while his influence lasted or until a new régime came in place of the present one and swept him out with the rest of the none too necessary bunch. Only those were retained by a new régime in the police department who showed exceptional ability and who had performed some laudable and memorable act in the course of their service.

Detective Gastein had nothing to his credit during his two years' service at the bureau. Not even industry, or initiative. Captain Wanger, chief of detectives, whenever he met old Gibbons at the café, where he would drop in now and again to look over the newspapers, did not enthuse over the old fellow's protégé. He expected Gibbons' son to exhibit a greater quantity of deducing and reasoning quality than he showed. The chief had kept him on merely to please the old man, who often helped them out with advice in major criminal cases and who was respected and befriended by the high officials of the ministry.

The fact that Detective Gastein was in conference with Mr. Gibbons when I went to interview him brought out all this information from my colleagues when we met after the day's work was over early in the morning. We found it natural that the young detective should go to his father and get the benefit of his experience and specially fitted mentality in a case of such importance as the Krondheim pearl case proved to be. Gibbons would surely help his own kin first and we soon came to the conclusion that he was giving the young man advice that he would not give to any one else, certainly not the press.

We took it for granted that the suggestions he had dropped to me that afternoon were more misleading camouflage than anything else and that his real tip, if he did have one, went to his son. We also surmised that the son was badly in need of some distinguishing deed if he hoped to keep his job for any length of time. We had implicit faith in the genius of old Gibbons. We knew of a number of big cases where his suggestions had been taken and had been followed by prompt results. He had never worked on a case personally. We had never known him to go out and work on a case, even to take the slightest part. He just planned campaigns, drew innumerable plans on the marble tops of café tables and directed the operation of the bureau from the café in the Archduke Stephen Hotel.

This being the case, we decided that in order to beat the other cartels and all the rest of the newspapers, we would have to keep an eye on young Gastein and follow his activities in the case, for we felt sure that old Gibbons was straining his brains as he had never strained them before, in order to get a break for his son. At least, that was the theory we adopted; and now it was up to us to find out whether it was sound or just a hunch.

They put me in charge of this phase of the operations—I being the youngest in the bunch of four. And the youngest fellow usually gets the toughest tasks and the toughest deal, as I have always experienced in my dealings with my colleagues around the press room. And I can't deny that the boy who later joined us and relieved me from my position as the youngest got no better deal from me than I had had from the older men in my time.

I got up at an unearthly hour the next morning. At nine o'clock I was already consuming my breakfast at the café in the Hotel Archduke Stephen. I wanted to see if the young detective would meet old Gibbons there before he started out for the day's work. Master Gibbons was there, but Gastein failed to turn up while I sat eating. Before I left the place I sauntered across to Gibbons.

"By the way," he said, "is there any break in that pearl case?"

"Not that I know," I replied.

"How does it look to you?" he inquired.

"The press room is rooting for the thief. A clever guy can always get our sympathy." I went on, "Unless, of course, it's a murder case. It's always good fun to watch a fellow get away with a couple of pearls so long as they belong to a millionaire banker."

"Well, I wouldn't say that," the old fellow reflected. "Sure enough, if they fail to catch the thief, it will be an everlasting blemish on the name of our police."

"How is young Gastein doing in it?" I asked, turning the conversation in the direction of my greatest interest. "I hope you gave him some sound dope to start him on the job."

"Yes, I always do, whenever he needs my advice. He is young and ambitious and a little advice never hurts."

"Have you any theory as to the thief?"

"The case itself is such that it presents but one theory," he answered. "You see, the man and his work are both unusual and out of the ordinary. No habitual criminal of the usual type has brains enough and humor enough to conceive a piece of work such as this. You've got to search for the man somewhere where thinking is being done and where men with brains gather. You'll never find him in a gin mill, or a second class hotel, or in the cheap suburbs. The very simplicity of the work shows a disciplined mind and a calculating brain. Sometimes I think I could have been the only one in Vienna to perpetrate a job like this," he said with a smile and a proud gleam in his eyes.

"I don't know of any other man in this town who could have evolved the scheme —except myself . . . True, the man must be superior to myself, inasmuch as he could not only plan it, but also carry it out. I would have proved myself inferior there. You see, I can plan and construct the most unusual things in my own profession, but when it comes to trying them out and putting them on, I have to get

my colleagues to do it. I couldn't face an audience with any of my tricks any more. As a matter of fact, I never could. I was a second rate conjurer while I was active on the stage. Some people are clever with their hands, others with their brains."

He laughed a good natured laugh and looked at me with his half closed eyes as if to fathom my thoughts. I am sure he could have read them if he had cared to. I felt like a looking glass whenever I talked to the man, he was so uncannily wise and so terribly superior. I noticed that he was evading the subject, so I just persisted and returned to it.

"What angle is Gastein tackling?" I asked.

"Oh, you'd like to know, wouldn't you? You see, it would be unwise for him to disclose his hand, for the least little thing might upset the theory. You'll have to wait and see. He might be chasing a phantom, for all I know. There is one thing, however, I may tell you, and that is that he has a theory of his own and he is working on that and not on any of my hunches. True, he discussed it with me, and I gave him a couple of hints, but he is certainly working on his own initiative and testing his powers. I hope he succeeds," he added after a pause.

I left him sipping his coffee, audibly enough. A crafty old fox, Master Gibbons. And a boastful one, at that. He could have been the only one in Vienna to put over a job like that. He was the only brainy and mathematical intellect in town. And though I disliked braggarts, I had to agree with him. Perhaps it was he. Who knew? He might have been saying that just to sidetrack any suspicion we might have had. Ah, nonsense. Nobody would dream of suspecting him, the friend of all the big men in town, the wizard who had spent twenty years of his life in respectability and was reputed to be a man of considerable means. Besides, everybody knew his face. He would have been recognized anywhere. My mind played with the fanciful idea merely because it would have been good story material and because I had dreamed of doing a scoop for my cartel one day that would establish my reputation as a reporter among the boys.

I WAITED at the opposite corner behind one of those advertising setups—broad, round wooden columns pasted over with posters—and watched the door of the café. I was waiting for Detective Gastein to turn up and then to follow him and get a line on his theory. Meanwhile I was weaving fantastic dreams, trying to connect Old Man Gibbons with the theft. I had enough police experience to start at the bottom of every theory; to look for the motive. What motive could Gibbons have? He could not possibly sell the pearls. He could not risk getting caught red handed. He could not risk the reputation of a lifetime for a few thousand crowns. There must have been some other motive. Perhaps he wanted to make a monkey of the chief of police.

I had to laugh at my own stupidity to be dwelling on a theory as preposterous as that. I would not have dared to hint at it to my colleagues, lest they should laugh me out of the press room. Really, I had no reason to suspect the old fellow at all. It was just the imagination of a youthful dreamer. And yet the hunch somehow persisted and I could not get my mind off the idea that the old man had played the trick in a prankish spirit or with some more sinister purpose. I could not fathom his motive. His own admission that he alone could have thought of a thing like that—though said as a joke—persisted to excite my imagination and I could not rid my mind of the suspicion that he had said that in order to carry his joke a step further and to enjoy my stupidity in accepting his words at their camouflaged value.

What made this hunch even more preposterous than it appeared was the fact that Old Man Gibbons was noted as a man of golden heart and endless charity. They said that he squandered fortunes every year by giving them away to

people who were hard up, or helping strangers who happened to need succor. He was beloved by all and sundry and his half closed, smiling eyes always gleamed with sympathy and love for all. I hated myself for my hunch and was trying to dismiss my ugly thoughts when my meditations were interrupted suddenly. I saw Detective Gastein entering the café. Through the large window pane I could see him approach the table where Gibbons had sat just before and where he usually sat when reading the morning papers. But I could not make out whether the old man was still there or not.

I advanced a few steps so as to get the sun out of my eyes and to get a better view into the shady nooks of the café. Gastein was still standing, talking to a waiter. Gibbons was gone. Then I saw the detective emerge from the café and stand waiting, as if at a loss, in front of the terrace, looking about him furtively as if he were pondering where the old man had got to. He glanced toward the hotel entrance now and again, as if expecting some one from there. I remained behind the advertising post and watched.

A moment or two later I saw an officer dressed in the gala uniform of the hussars emerge briskly from the hotel. He had two golden stars on his collar, denoting the rank of a lieutenant-colonel. Tall, slim and stately, with a small beard and thick mustachios, pointed at the ends, he was typically Hungarian, with that walk of authority and no small bravado that characterized the Hungarian hussar officer throughout the realm. He carried a small brief case in his right hand, holding his sword under his left arm. The porter was busy getting a cab for him and I had time to study him with no end of admiration while the cab drew up hurriedly and the man entered.

The cab drove off and I turned my attention again to Gastein. He looked after the departing cab for a moment, then darted toward the middle of the street where an empty cab was slowly cruising, opened the door while it was still in motion and I saw him point after the departing cab as if he had been instructing the driver to follow it.

With a flash it passed through my mind that the officer in the lieutenant-colonel's uniform must have been the thief. The fact that he was attired in another sort of uniform and one that commanded respect, after having used two other classes of uniforms already with success, indicated to my mind that Gastein was perhaps on the right track; and that it must have been the old man, with his deductive mind, who had tipped him off that the thief would have to be sought in a uniform of some sort. A lieutenant-colonel of the Hungarian hussars would not be subjected to suspicion. No police officer would dare to accost him, would dare to breathe a suspicion of the mildest sort accusing one of the caste. And this one was dressed in a gala uniform—perhaps on his way to the emperor for an audience. A clever thief of the kind we had to deal with would resort to a uniform that would insure immunity when making his escape.

All this passed through my mind while I was frantically searching for a taxi to follow the two. Luckily there was no traffic deserving of the name in Vienna at the time and the two minutes that passed between their departure and my finding a taxi did not make much of a difference. They were driving along the Great Ring toward the Opera House and the Royal Burg and I could still see them in the distance, about ten blocks away, when I got into my taxi and ordered the driver to catch up with them.

The first car stopped in front of the Royal Palace. The great iron gate was wide open and the lieutenant-colonel walked straight through it with the air of a man going home. The detective's car drew up behind the first one just as the officer entered the gate. I stopped my taxi on the other side of the broad circle and watched the drama enacted in front of the palace. It was short and to the point. The two sentinels in front of the palace saluted the officer by standing at attention and running their hands down

the straps of their shouldered rifles and gazing after him with stiffened necks and bodies. Gastein jumped out of his car and rushed to the one the officer came in, shouting to the driver, who looked back expectantly, in the hope that another fare was about to engage him. Gastein opened the door of the first car and took the brief case the officer had left in the cab, then made a determined effort to run after him.

The two sentinels, however, barred him from entering. I could see him showing his badge, arguing with the soldiers, but they would not budge. They must have had orders not to permit civilians to enter. He blew a whistle and soon the uniformed man on the nearby post came trotting up. While he waited for him, Gastein opened the brief case and drew from it a small white package. I could see him unwrap it and gaze at the contents with amazed eyes, fingering the small objects for a moment and slipping the package into his trousers pocket.

The two cabs were waiting in the meanwhile. Gastein took the serial number of the first one, then instructed the uniformed man to wait there; and he must have told him to arrest the lieutenant-colonel of hussars when he should return. Then he jumped into the cab, drove to the café, three or four blocks away, and rushed to the telephone. I followed and entered the adjoining booth to listen to what he had to report. I heard him say:

"Send a squad of men to surround the palace, Captain. He is in there. Why not? Hell, the emperor needn't know. There will be no scandal at all. No one will observe. I put a uniformed man at the gate, but he might escape through some other entrance. You must—I've got the pearls all right. Well, go and consult the chief. Hurry up, or he'll get away. . . ."

I watched the detective rush out of the place and enter the cab again. I thought I had seen enough. I was elated and happy. Good for Gastein! He had made good. His promotion was assured. I was torn between duty and admiration for the young man. Should I rush to the press room and tell my cartel members, or should I run to the Archduke Stephen Hotel and tell Old Man Gibbons first? It would be on my way anyhow. I drove back to the hotel and walked up two flights and knocked on the door at the apartment Gibbons occupied. I could not wait for the "come in" call. I just pushed the door in and entered. Old Gibbons was standing in front of the mirror, tearing off his false beard and mustachios, the tunic of the uniform lying on the chair and the trousers still on him. I must have stared at him with protruding eyes and stammered some apology as I was on the point of drawing back, when he turned. He had seen me enter in the looking glass. He said:

"Come in, old boy. Don't get so excited. Sit down. I'll be ready in a tick."

I closed the door and bolted it with an automatic movement. He noticed what I had done.

"That's right. You seem to have more sense than I have."

I was unable to utter a word. I sat down and watched him smear off the mucilage. He looked at me and smiled benevolently.

"You see, I saw you from the café hiding behind the advertising post. Then I saw you following Gastein in a cab. I didn't expect you to come up here. I thought you'd dash to the press room or to your paper."

"I wanted to tell you—" I stammered. "But what's the meaning of—"

"Well, you see, I am expecting to join my ancestors soon and I was afraid George Gastein would never make good in the department. I wanted to give him a lift before I cleared off. I have nothing to leave him, so I just wanted to put him right with his job."

He paused and glanced in my direction to see how I took this confession. Then he resumed in an offhand way:

"I am sure your father would have done that much for you if circumstances had warranted it. You see, I tipped him off about the hussar officer who lived next door to me in this hotel. I hired the room

a week ago in this uniform and my make-up. Gastein doesn't know. He is hunting for the officer now, I bet. I knew they would not let him follow me into the palace. He is so dumb, you can put anything over on him."

He had by this time resumed his original face, put the uniform away and put on his dressing gown, lighted a cigar and sat down opposite me in a big armchair.

"Thank God it's over. I suppose it will be a good story for your paper. I am sure they wouldn't prosecute me, considering that I let them have the pearls back. But George will lose his job."

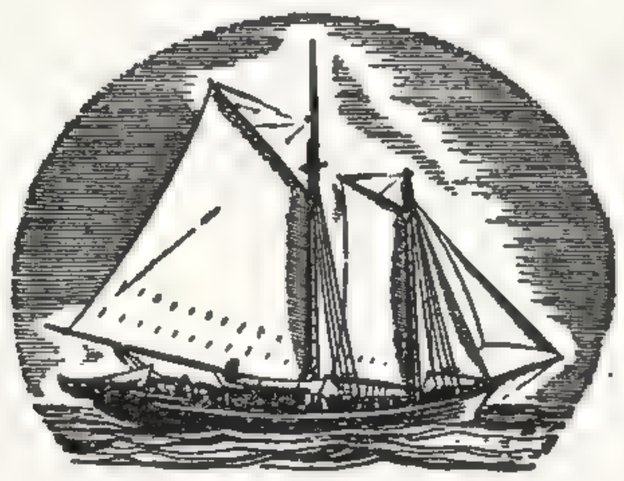
I had a hard time repressing a tear that was trying to sneak out of my eye.

"No," I said, "he wouldn't lose his job on my account."

"I knew he wouldn't on your account," he said. "You see, you have to help the other guy, if he is weaker than yourself. He'll gain confidence now, and his pride in himself will urge him along. Now he'll make good. I'm sure."

* * *

There are certain things one doesn't tell even one's cartel members. There are stories one doesn't care to write for some reason or other. This was one I waited fifteen years to write, and I am not sorry



NAUFRAGIUM *by* HARRY KEMP

THOUGH I'm a broken ship in empty sand
Do, poet, sing the song that truth must say
Call no one's pity on me any day,
For I've been everything the Builder planned.
Don't hawk a threnody about the land
On me: I have borne up the glittering bay,
Glittering, more brave, myself; treading the spray;
No other ship has walked, more great or grand!

Though full of sand and shells and long-topped weed
Is it not something to have been? To have gone
Vast voyages where alien stars abide,
Shaking whole oceans from each streaming side
With satisfaction in the accomplished deed?—
All I have been, is mine! I envy none!

Concluding

They March From Yesterday

PRIVATE Edouard Maguil, soldier of the French Foreign Legion, had left his girl, his job and his name of Peter Kempton behind him when he skipped to France to escape the racketeers who had killed his stepfather in his New York garage. Maguil hoped to lose himself in the Legion, and tried; but the march from yesterday, from his past, was a hopeless one. Mae Gordon, the girl he had left behind, suddenly appeared in Oran, and Maguil got leave to go from Sidi-bel-Abbes for the week-end to see her. Mae was stranded, without money; she had quit her job as companion to wealthy Miss Drake, an American tourist.

Maguil could think of no way in which he could explain to Mae how utterly poor a Legionnaire was—how unthinkable marriage would be, how impossible for him to buy her a ticket home. It was well that he did not explain, for by the greatest good fortune, Cordova, a fellow Legionnaire, that very evening asked Maguil if he could fight. If Maguil could box, or

A Two-Part Novel of the French Foreign Legion by

GEORGES SURDEZ

fight, or carry on against the wild Tamar, in the place of the boxer who had failed to appear, Maguil could earn two thousand francs. If Maguil won, the purse would be four thousand francs.

Maguil fought. He despised Cordova—and always suspected him of trying to desert the Legion; and he had the most profound contempt for Cordova's associates. But, in the ring against Tamar the Oranese, Maguil fought with such native agility that no one missed the scheduled professional. When he went down in the fifth round, the crowd moaned. The bell saved him—at the count of five.

"DON'T quit in your corner," Bob begged. It would look bad."

"I'm tired as hell, "Maguil explained.

"He's no better. He's worn himself out. Look at him pant—but take the dive when you feel like it."

In the sixth round Tamar reestablished

the situation as he liked it, drove Maguil from corner to corner along the ropes, forced him to bend double to protect his throbbing stomach. But the Legionnaire's legs, toughened by long marches, his body fed on coarse but healthy food, recuperated more quickly than those of the Oranese. Maguil was not a good boxer, but he had sufficient spirit to dislike to go down purposely. When his strength came back he started fighting again.

Tamar suddenly dropped into a clinch, his head nestled on Maguil's chest. The referee slapped the American on the shoulders.

"Break, Thompson, break—"

Maguil grunted wearily, dropped his hands and stepped back. But Tamar's head followed him, though his feet remained rooted to one spot. When Maguil stepped aside, Tamar fell face down. At ten, he had not moved. The crowd cheered for a long time.

"He quit cold," Bob stated. "I saw him break his fall with his arms. Probably had it fixed for his seconds to yell foul—but they didn't dare because he got rattled and chose the wrong moment."

"What time is it?"

"Ten to twelve."

Maguil rose and submitted to Tamar's kisses of congratulation. A lean sergeant in khaki, whom Maguil recognized as belonging to the training Battalion in Bel-Abbes, pushed his way forward.

"What's Thompson going to do with his gloves?"

"I don't know," Maguil said.

"Present them to me."

"Yes."

Then newspapermen asked for information about his former career. Bob explained volubly. At last Maguil was behind the screen, dressing. Cordova, in uniform now, appeared with Desfarges. He counted out two one-thousand franc bills and twenty one-hundred franc notes. Four thousand in all—one hundred and sixty dollars, enough to supply the balance of Mae's passage.

Bob held up a mirror and Maguil saw that beyond a slight puffing of the left cheek and red spots on brows and chin, he was not marked severely. But he winced and groaned when he buckled his belt over the sash. He shook hands with Bob, who wished him luck. Then he, with Cordova beside him, moved through the crowd still hanging at the rear gate without being noticed.

The two had beer at a nearby bar.

"Sure you can't spare anything?" Cordova asked.

"Sure," Maguil stated definitely. "Anyway, I wouldn't help you desert. Not that I judge you, but I'd feel partly to blame if you got into trouble."

"All right. Good night."

Cordova left without shaking hands. Maguil went back to his cell of a room in a third class hotel and fell asleep almost immediately.

CHAPTER IV

COURT-MARTIAL

"WHAT happened to your face, Peter?" Mae asked.

"Went out last night and got into a row," he explained casually. He slipped an envelop across the tablecloth. "Here's your fare. You can pay me back when you're able. It's man to man, you know."

Mae smiled.

"I don't need it," she said. "Look at this—the old dear—"

It was a letter from Miss Drake.

My dear child:

I am enclosing a draft for two hundred dollars. You can call it compensation and use it to get home, or advance salary and come to join me in Tunis. I was perhaps too hasty and lacked understanding. By now, you have seen your friend, so I dare hope you will join me. I have so much trust in you that I decided not to write your family and worry them needlessly—so if you go home, or if you come back with me, in either case all will be well.

"You're going to accept it?" Maguil asked.

"I'd be a fool not to," she said. "As long as I can't stay with you, I'll join her

and go with the trip. Write me care of the express company in Cairo."

"Best thing to do," Maguil agreed. He slipped the four thousand francs into his pocket. "What train do you take?"

"Miss Drake adds, on the back of the letter, that there is a seat reserved for me in today's tourist bus, starting at noon from the Grand Hotel.

"At noon? In two hours?"

"In two hours, yes, Peter."

"What must be must be," he concluded. "I'd have to leave before five anyway. Due back in Bel-Abbes tonight."

They strolled through the streets until the time for parting. Mae wept convulsively at the last moment, and the tourists, who did not have the preconceived notions of Legion privates entertained by the grinning porters, promised Maguil to take care of her. They had no difficulty sensing romance, for in every other sentence Mae declared that she would wait. Two elderly American gentlemen in the bus thrust cigarets into Maguil's pockets, slapped his back and in the general emotion, he ended by shedding two or three tears himself.

"She's in good hands, boy; don't worry."

"Goodby, Peter."

And the bus was off, the interlude at an end. Maguil felt limp and springless. His heart was heavy. Half a block down was a bar. He entered to escape the beating sun and the stare of the little native bootblacks. He absorbed a Beryl-Cassis, then a "bock" of beer, ate dried codfish served with the drinks without thinking. This made him thirstier and he drank two glasses of white wine.

Now Mae was gone, he chided himself for a fool. Why had he been so reserved? He did love her, after all, and if she chose to promise faith, why hadn't he clinched the engagement? As it was, he had allowed her to leave with the impression that his love for her was lukewarm, more admiration that real attachment. But the end had been so swift—

Outside once more, the hot sun burned his sore face, made him sick and dizzy. He went back to his room, decided to sleep until half past three and then to stroll easily to the station to catch the 5:08 train. He woke at 5:30!

Two courses were open before him—to report at the little depot of the Legion, near the railroad station, and explain his case, or hire an automobile to get back to Bel-Abbes. The first solution had a drawback. He would be punished, lightly of course, but enough to mar his promise of good behavior to Pavert, tacitly given by the mere request for a favor. He had plenty of money—a small fortune for a soldier—and it was tempting to roll up before the grilled gate of the barracks and take out crisp hundred franc bills before an astonished sergeant. The road was good, passing through Sainte-Barbe du Tlélat, and there was no chance of getting there later than 12:00, which small delay would be forgiven.

He went to a café near the Place d'Armes, where chauffeurs congregated to play cards. To his astonishment, Hirschmann was there, in civilian clothing, drinking at the bar.

"You missed the train, too?"

"Yes, and I have no leave, so I got this rig. You have a drink with me, no?"

"Let me treat. And I'll invite you to come down to Bel-Abbes in my auto. See, I have plenty of money. Didn't have to give it out after all."

"All the money?" Hirschmann asked. "Four thousand francs?"

"Except a couple of hundred."

"You take Cordova too?"

"Sure. Won't cost me much more. Where is he?"

"Inside."

They found Cordova with two girls, heavy, dark Spanish wenches. Cordova shook hands and asked the newcomers to sit down. They put their heads together over the table, drinking from time to time. Cordova was trying to sell his cigaret case and bracelet to the girls.

"Worth ten thousand francs if a sou, little ones. Club together and buy them for two thousand. What do you say, Sophia?

"We can't get more than fifteen hundred," Sophia said.

"Eh, Cordova—" Hirschmann put in. "Maguil—he think you desert?"

"He does?" Cordova smiled.

"And he says he pay for automobile back to barracks. Don't you, Maguil?"

"Sure thing. Come on, Cordova, have some sense."

"Cost you two hundred and fifty, very likely," Cordova said.

"It doesn't matter."

"He's got the four thousand," Hirschmann put in.

Cordova turned to the girls.

"Beat it. I don't need you. Here's a pal will lend me if I need." He threw down a fifty franc bill. "Here, and keep your mouths shut, eh?"

"What do you think we are?" Sophia asked.

The girls left.

"Let's get started," Maguil suggested.

"Plenty of time. If we start at 7:30, we'll get there soon enough. On Sunday night an hour either way isn't held against you too hard." Cordova laughed. "I was trying to raise money to pay my debts in Bel-Abbes and pay for an auto back. The adjutant at the little depot has it in for me, and I wouldn't dare show myself there. Not when overstaying leave. I've cabled for money—and it will come in a week or so. But I sure had the cockroach for a space. Imagined I wouldn't get any more money when it's sure to come."

"We eat?" Hirschmann asked.

They asked for food and ate heartily—mussels, chops, beans, washed down with red wine.

AT SEVEN Cordova went out to get a chauffeur. He returned with a stocky, good looking young man.

"He has a Renault car and will take us where we want—" he said.

"Sure," the chauffeur agreed.

"Better get into uniform," Maguil suggested to Hirschmann.

"I have it here," the German said, holding out a bundle wrapped in newspaper. "I'll change later. Don't want to rent room again. Can't change here."

"We'll stop somewhere on the road," Maguil assented.

They went out and got in the taxi, a private car transformed into a hack, quite roomy and upholstered in pearl gray. Flowers were in a cut glass vase. They slid away smoothly.

"Style," Maguil said.

"You bet," Cordova admitted. "What went wrong that you kept your money?"

"My girl got a draft from somewhere."

"Fine."

They had left the city and rolled on a smooth, tree lined road. Suddenly the car halted. The chauffeur turned.

"This is as far as I'll go," he said.

Cordova laid his hand on Maguil's.

"Come outside awhile; I want to speak to you. Don't bother bawling him out. I told him to take us somewhere between Oran and Fleurus."

Hirschmann sat on the running board, while Maguil, uneasy, followed Cordova out of earshot.

"What's up?" he asked. "Fleurus is not on the way to Bel-Abbes."

"We're deserting—don't interrupt—it's a sure thing. There's a Spanish sailing ship, a little one, that crosses to Malaga. Couldn't pick us up in Oran, but she'll be waiting somewhere west of Azrew. We'll go on until we see her light. The captain is asking two hundred and fifty pesetas apiece to take us on account of the risk and loss in business if he's found out. For the three of us, that's about three thousand francs. I was trying to raise it and couldn't. You have four thousand; hand them over. Come with us, too—you can get home. I'll meet some one in Spain who'll give me all I need and more. I like you. Come along."

"I don't want to desert," Maguil said.

"From Malaga you can wire that girl to meet you in Spain somewhere. I'll let you have money then. Promised! Or if you don't want to come, give us the four thousand. I'll send it back to you later."

"Nothing doing."

"Hirschmann!"

The German arrived and pressed something hard against Maguil's back.

"That's a gun," he said very quietly.

"Here's the money," Maguil said. "It's a dirty trick."

"Thanks. You haven't lost it. Now for the chauffeur. We can't take him along, or he'd tip off the police soon as he had a chance and we might be caught in the territorial waters of France. Maguil, keep out of it unless you want to come with us."

"No, I'll stick. He'll be my witness that I could have gone."

"You damned fool. But as you wish." They went back to the chauffeur. "Listen, fellow, we need your car tonight. It won't be hurt, the cops will find it near Azrew tomorrow morning. We'll give you two hundred francs and tie you up. You and your honest friend will keep each other company."

"No joke?" the chauffeur asked sarcastically. "Keep your money and I'll keep my car. You'd go and bust it on me, sure. You're drunk, all of you."

"Hirschmann!"

The German came forward and held out a big revolver.

"That's a gun," he announced.

"Say, my wife will worry if I don't get back," the chauffeur pleaded.

"Put your hands forward," Cordova ordered sharply, taking a length of rope from his pocket. "Be nice now, be nice—"

The chauffeur grew angry, struck Cordova on the mouth.

"Here's how nice I can be."

Hirschmann stepped forward, but Maguil threw himself against him, held his left wrist and masked the revolver with his own chest.

"Cut it, Hirschmann, cut it!"

The chauffeur was climbing back into the driver's seat. What followed did not consume five seconds' time.

"Hand me that gun," Cordova snapped.

Hirschmann gave him the revolver and grappled with Maguil. Two heavy detonations—and Maguil saw, in the halo of light cast back from the long shafts piercing the darkness ahead, the chauffeur reeling, falling backward. Then he was limp, a heap of garments near the right front wheel.

"Quick, get in, Hirschmann. Coming, Maguil?"

Maguil, drunk with rage, struck Cordova and knocked him down. Then Hirschmann drove his big head into Maguil's stomach, sending him staggering back, until he tripped and fell seated near the body of the chauffeur. Hirschmann climbed in beside Cordova. The two cursed and fumbled about.

"Self-starter doesn't work," Cordova said. "Where's the crank?"

They both got out and searched hastily, throwing tools out of the chest right and left. Maguil tried to rise and Hirschmann kicked him in the side.

"Slob! Quitter! Dirty Frenchman!"

Maguil's hand encountered something dark and cold; the crank which the chauffeur had picked up as a weapon to defend himself a few seconds before he was shot. Maguil realized his own plight. He was a Legionnaire, had overstayed leave, would be called an accomplice. He must get away now. He struggled to rise, to shout, to indicate the crank. Hirschmann whirled upon him and kicked him again and again. Half conscious, he could not move. Beneath his back he felt the still warm body of the murdered man, and, under his outflung right leg, the crank.

Cordova stood in the full light, twisting his hands and crying like an hysterical woman. The German cursed him for a coward, ransacked the tool kit once more, tore up the cushions.

"Can't find it—can't find it—can't find it—"

"This ship will wait until 4:00. We must try and make it on foot," Cordova said.

"Yes, yes."

Hirschmann kicked Maguil two or three times for good measure and ran after Cordova, already far down the road.

"PRESENT arms!"

The detachment on duty in the courtroom, Zouaves of the 8th regiment, brought rifles rigidly to the right side, left arm flung smartly across the chest, in a single creaking of leather, a single impact of moist palms on wood. The strong sun pouring through the tall windows of the long room, striking the white walls, caught on the slender, scintillating blades of the bayonets.

The officers of the court-martial entered, filed gravely to their seats. Maguil had risen to attention with his two companions on the accused men's bench—and eyed them anxiously. Before many hours, these men would have decided his fate, death or prison.

Colonel Corval presided. The breast of his tunic sparkled with decorations; he had fiery eyes beneath heavy brows and no kindness in his glance. On his right was a bald headed captain of Zouaves and a Tirailleur subaltern. On his left an artillery officer and one of the Spahis. Gun butts crashed to the floor, the reflection from the bayonets danced sharply on the walls. The accused men sat down between their guards.

In the rear of the room the hostile public rustled. Many of Marcel Berville's friends had come to see him avenged. His widow was present with three small children. A brief formality opened the trial—an explanation of how these military prisoners had first been questioned by civilian officials. Procedure at a court-martial differs in many ways from civilian customs, and it was Colonel Corval who questioned the prisoners as to their true identity.

Cordova gave his real name—Boutrós Kaddour—his birthplace as Beyrouth, Syria. His actual nationality was therefore French, as his native land was under French mandate. Maguil was startled. This identity differed widely from Cordova's veiled hints at a romantic South American origin.

Hirschmann had no alias. He gave his birthplace as Cologne.

Maguil rose in turn, admitted having been known in France as Pierre Landrier, having called himself Shark Thompson in Oran on one occasion, and swore that Peter Kempton was his real name, given to him legally by adoption by his stepfather.

The trial was officially opened when a thin lieutenant popped up from behind a table and read *la mise en jugement*, the placing under trial of the three suspects. The court clerk, an *adjudant*, then recited the report made up by the investigating captain, including what was known of the men's past, the events leading up to the crime, the arrest of the three; Maguil picked up stunned on the road by passing automobilists, Cordova and Hirschmann caught separately trying to make their way into Morocco.

This was twice interrupted by sobs of the widow and her children, and sullen grumbling from the dead man's friends. Feeling against the three Legionnaires was running high in Oran. Even the four months that the preliminary inquest had consumed had not abated rumors of a lynching—utterly wild talk considering the military protection granted the culprits at the time. The report underlined the many discrepancies between the statements of Cordova and Hirschmann, which agreed only on one point: Maguil had fired the shots.

Their version was that Maguil, attacked by the chauffeur with the crank, had fired, against their advice. They pointed to the prizefight as proof of his brutality. Colonel Corval took up the questioning, and though the men's true names were known, he addressed them by the names they had taken when they enlisted in the Legion.

"Cordova, Hirschmann, Maguil, is it exact that you met about half past five on the day of the crime in the Café de Lyons?"

"Yes, Colonel."

"You admit owning the revolver, Cordova?"

"Yes, Colonel."

"You admit carrying the revolver, Hirschmann?"

"Yes, Colonel."

"When did Maguil take possession of it, Hirschmann?"

"Just before firing, Colonel. He said, 'Hand me the gun!' "

"You refused? Then how did he obtain it?"

"He took it from my pocket, Colonel."

"Your side pocket, then? How, already beaten by the victim—the blows which marked him and which he claims were caused by your kicks—how did he have the strength and time to reach into your pocket?"

"I was mistaken, Colonel. I had it in my hand. I remember now—"

"Why did you have it in your hand, Hirschmann?"

"To intimidate the victim, Colonel."

"You did not intend to do more?"

"No, Colonel."

"The report states you spoke bad French. You seem to express yourself with ease now. How is that?"

"Studied in jail, to defend myself, Colonel."

"Cordova, why did you trust your revolver to Hirschmann?"

"Colonel, he said he would not hesitate. I was not sure I could even intimidate any one." Cordova's nails dug into the flesh of his palms, his voice quivered. "I have never before been mixed in a crime, Colonel."

"Cordova, you agree with Hirschmann —that Maguil took the revolver and fired two shots at the victim?"

"Yes, Colonel."

"Maguil, who fired the shots?"

"Cordova, Colonel. I was struggling with Hirschmann and Cordova grasped the revolver and fired twice."

"It was after that Hirschmann assaulted you?"

"No, after I had struck Cordova, Colonel. First he knocked me down with his head, then kicked me."

"They had taken your money previously—four thousand francs?"

"Yes, Colonel."

"And you refused to have the young lady, who was seen parting from you before the hotel—you refused to allow her to be called to testify? The American consulate reports a conversation over the phone in the sense you give it. You stick to your statement as read in the report?"

"Absolutely, Colonel."

"Cordova and Hirschmann, why did you flee on foot instead of using the car? You both admit knowing how to operate an automobile. Salvation, you believed, was a short distance away. Why did you run on foot?"

"The self-starter did not work, Colonel," Hirschmann replied.

"Why did you not use the crank, Hirschmann? Cordova?"

Hirschmann was mute.

"I—we—both dreaded to touch the corpse, Colonel," Cordova said.

"You preferred to risk capture—miss your escape?"

"Death is horrible to me, Colonel."

"To me, too, Colonel," Hirschmann declared.

Sophia Linares, the friend of Cordova, was the first witness.

"Your age, place of birth?"

"Twenty-two, monsieur. Born in Mascara, August 12th, 1894."

"That makes thirty-one, it seems." Corval concealed his smile with his glove. "Never mind. How did you come to meet Cordova?"

"Professionally."

"And your profession is—"

"Entertainer."

"Tell us all you know about these three men, mademoiselle."

"I have known M. Cordova over a year. M. Hirschmann six months."

"Intimately?"

"Yes—one might say that."

"Maguil?"

"I saw him that night for the first time. M. Maguil said he would pay for a car to take them back to barracks. They kidded him because he thought they were trying to desert."

"You may go, mademoiselle."

"Can I stay and listen? I know them and I'm sort of interested."

"Yes. Next witness."

This was an Oranese Frenchman who, returning with a party of friends after a day in the country, found the abandoned car. They had seen Maguil lying on top of the murdered man.

"Maguil was unconscious, on his back?"

"On his back, across the body, which was face down."

"All right."

THE LAWYERS defending Cordova and Hirschmann had lost hope. If Maguil had been struck with sufficient force to knock him unconscious, he would not have had time to seize the revolver from a powerful man like Hirschmann. Then he would not have fallen backward upon the corpse. Had he pitched forward on his face and then rolled over, he would have been found clear of the body. From the report of the police, the tool kit had been searched. The chauffeur would not have permitted this had he been alive.

What were they searching for, Cordova and Hirschmann—Maguil being admittedly unconscious—if not for the crank to start the car? Had they seen Berville striking Maguil with the tool, they would not have searched elsewhere. Due to the two days delay in their arrests, they had had time to read the newspapers and compose a story. And, as they had separated from each other to be less noticeable, their stories had not jibed.

Furthermore, neither could answer why, if Maguil had contributed to their escape to the extent of murder, they had left him by the roadside rather than overcome a rather improbable dread of the corpse. When Maguil's lawyer, provided by the state, pointed this out, Hirschmann broke down and wept with his face in his hands.

The revolver was brought into court, a doctor from the hospital described in cold terms the nature of the wounds, one of which had burst the heart, the other piercing the brain from ear to ear. The hand of death could be felt groping for some one in the room. After a recess, Cordova's lawyer said his client had confessed he had fired the shots and read a statement pleading for mercy to show that Cordova had never been a killer and had acted under panic.

Boutros Kaddour had been educated in the French College at Beyrouth, then had spent some time in the United States with an uncle, who dealt in art objects. After a checkered career, he had posed as a well to do Peruvian and deceived a wealthy lady, with whom he had traveled extensively without definite position in her household. The husband, returning from a long voyage, had threatened to have him jailed for having disposed of some of his wife's jewels. Cordova had agreed to enlist in the Legion, provided he received a certain sum each month, thus punishing himself, getting out of the way, and preventing a scandal.

The husband had died and the money had stopped. Cordova, tired of the Legion, tried to desert, hoping to find the lady again. Cordova, his lawyer concluded, was a crook, an unscrupulous adventurer, but had not the daring to kill except in moment of panic. He would never commit another such crime. Fifteen years would be sufficient punishment.

The prosecuting captain rose. He went into the details of the crime.

"Cordova tells us the story of his life, duping a woman. Is that an excuse? Do not return such a man to society. He can not deserve less than death. Hirschmann is an animal, a brute. You shall condemn him to hard labor for life. Peter Kempton, alias Landrier, alias Thompson, alias Maguil, is the least guilty of the three. Nevertheless, in spite of witnesses, it is my belief that, seeing the young woman, he was tempted to desert and acted upon the idea. Is it probable he did not notice that the direction taken by the taxi was not the one leading to the barracks? He showed marked hesitation, perhaps stopped short of murder. But remember that the motive for desertion existed and that he was in the company of deserters. With deserters and murderers. Discipline can not be made a dead letter. Maguil's guilt in the crime is unproved, but

his innocence in the question of desertion is most doubtful. You shall condemn him to hard labor, on the military offense, for five years."

Cordova's lawyer resumed his hopeless task in hopeless tones:

"My client begs an opportunity to atone by a long stretch of thankless labor —even perpetual hard labor. Death is too easy. Do not send him from life; do not sentence him to death—"

"Not a criminal," Hirschmann's lawyer said of his client, "but a man of attenuated responsibility—in this crime led by a stronger will than his own. His place is the asylum."

Maguil's lawyer rose.

"I surrender my case in the hands of some one who knows Maguil better than I—his commander during the period in which he, the son of a Frenchman, received the baptism of fire for France! Lieutenant Pavert—"

Pavert appeared in dress uniform, wearing his numerous decorations. On his sleeves were the wound and service chevrons of the World War. He saluted the presiding colonel.

"Have I permission to speak, Colonel?"

"Yes, Lieutenant."

"I had obtained for Maguil special leave for Oran. In the midst of his troubles he found time to worry about my opinion and wrote me to assure me that he had not abused my kindness. No one can prove his innocence. No one can probe his guilt. He alone, in the secret of his conscience, knows. My belief is that his four months in prison, awaiting trial, have been sufficient punishment. Do not send him to jail for several years; do not waste a superb soldier. As a recruit of less than a year's service, he performed like a veteran, like a Legionnaire. Do not send him to rust in a penal camp. France has need of him. Place him back where he belongs—in action—and in his name I take the engagement that he will atone by valor and discipline for any fault of his. I have been twenty years in the army. I believe I know men. That's all, Colonel."

"Your words shall be considered, Lieutenant."

The officers of the court-martial left by one door; the accused men were led out by another. Cordova and Hirschmann sat together with their lawyers, all four looking rather gloomy. Maguil was uneasy. The prosecutor had struck a sensitive note, and he might well be refused the benefit of the doubt, be condemned as a deserter—or for participation in an attempt to desert. Pavert came to see him.

"I did my best to help you, Maguil. Meanwhile, and privately, I believe you will have the chance to go to the mobile group of Taza, if acquitted. You will have a chance to redeem yourself. I feel that you are telling the truth, but others are not sure. This will blow over, I hope. Regardless of the decision, consider me your friend."

They shook hands and Maguil was taken in with the others to hear the sentences. The long room was emptied of spectators, for the decisions had been announced to the public. The court-martial judges were gone.

"Cordova, Hirschmann, Maguil, rise."

The three stood, anxiety tearing at their hearts.

"Cordova—military degradation—and death."

Cordova remained straight, head high, smiling, but Maguil saw a tremor shaking his cheeks.

"Hirschmann—military degradation—and perpetual hard labor."

"Thanks!" Hirschmann bellowed.

"Maguil, acquitted."

CHAPTER V

REDEMPTION

THE MOBILE GROUP of Taza was resting for the first time in several months. Every one knew that this was the calm before the storm. The entire chain of mountains from the sea to the Sahara was restless. The Riff mess was expected to spread to the French

side, following Abd-el-Krim's smashing successes against the Spaniards.

Corporal Maguil of the Legion battalion had served throughout the hard campaign against the Marmushas. He had joined the unit at El-Mellah, a fort occupying the ridge of a hill of the Middle Atlas. His company commander was Captain Tarvan; his section was under Lieutenant Moralvi, a stocky, truculent Corsican, who had packed a knapsack when knapsacks weighed over thirty kilos. He had landed at Sebdul-Bahr in 1915, fought in Macedonia and Serbia in the ranks of the Legion battalion of the celebrated First March Regiment of Africa. Tarvan had questioned Maguil casually, but Moralvi had shown great interest in him from the start.

"You're the Maguil Pavert wrote me about, eh?"

"Yes, Lieutenant."

"And you were sent out here to redeem yourself, to take it out on the hides of the Moroccans! I like your face. Pavert speaks well of you, wants you to have opportunities to see what you can do. First chance you become corporal. Better volunteer for scrapes out of which one returns either a hero or a smashed mug. Pavert, my friend, was my comrade in the mounted company in 1913. I'll give you every chance you ask for."

Maguil had heard something of what happened in the mobile group and he felt that if he lived six months longer, the age of miracles was not ended. In the last campaign preceding his arrival the company had melted from two hundred and fifty to one hundred and thirty; a corpse left here, another there; bullets, knives, dysentery, fevers, rheumatism, desertions. A mobile group is a miniature army, comprising infantry—usually a unit of Legion to stiffen Moroccan and Senegalese infantry—cavalry, artillery and auxiliary branches.

One morning Maguil found himself at his place in the ranks, equipment rolled in the tent cloth slung over his loins, for the knapsack is no longer used on column. The brass of the bugles flashed in a brief flourish in the sunlight. A call resounded and they were off.

This was the start of six months of day marches, night marches, skirmishes and combats, pitched battles. Treks of thirty to forty kilometers a day were not rare, with a scrap at the finish to soothe one's nerves. Maguil trudged across plains, up hills, down slopes, into valleys endlessly. Before his eyes unrolled panoramas seldom seen by European eyes. The men of the mobile group received little mail, moving about too swiftly for it to follow.

Maguil, spurred constantly by Moralvi, could not avoid distinguishing himself. He fought less for duty and honor than to please him, to have Pavert learn that he was trying, that he was grateful.

"Volunteers needed," Moralvi would say.

"Present—Maguil, Edouard," he would answer, feeling the questing glance. And he would scramble down the slope in the twilight to take a message to an isolated detachment, or grope in the darkness with a few comrades to locate a lost patrol.

"Machine gun section out of contact. Volunteer, Maguil?"

And Maguil was off once more in mad gallops across sun blasted slopes covered with stubble, bullets plopping like hail, whining away in a crooning song into the sky. When his corporal failed to rise after a bound forward during a skirmish in the Jebel Moussa, Moralvi raised his hand for Maguil, and Maguil was promoted to wear the double green wool stripes. After that, he might have considered himself redeemed, but moral qualities, like muscles, develop and strengthen with use. Maguil had answered that one word "volunteer" so often that his reply had become automatic.

One afternoon a plane crashed ahead of the French lines. Maguil led his squad through the bush. The pilot was dead, but the observer, a captain, had crawled from the wreck with a broken leg. His face was white, not alone from the pain—but the certainty of torture should the mountaineers reach him first. Maguil

brought him in and earned the second citation, another nail on his Cross Ribbon.

Another exploit crystalized his reputation. A rain storm caught the mobile group in the mountains, in march formation. The vanguard was out of contact. Maguil, who was with it, started off to find the main body. He recalled having crossed a narrow gully on the way, a clear little stream of water six inches deep and two yards wide. He found in its place a torrent thirty feet wide and ten feet deep. A man with his equipment had no chance. He removed his clothing, tied his boots around his neck, plunged in. He had breasted the tide in the Hudson River more than once. Rolling stones bruised him as he was rolled in the creamy, swirling water. He emerged before a startled group of officers, clad in boots, cartridge belt, rifle in hand. Result: a palm on the ribbon.

Until that day he had been haunted by the fear of death. Then fear left him completely. He dropped it as a child loses a first tooth. He had become a true Legionnaire, confident in his destiny—a man nothing could kill.

Day by day he grew accustomed to carnage, the sight of crippled comrades, the ghastly head of a friend left by the enemy as a defiance. His brain no longer whirled in hand to hand combat. He found in it a bitter, exceedingly keen excitement, a voluptuous enjoyment when he emerged alive. Physically, the change had been even more marked. The flesh had left his body and he carried on with a frame of bone and sinews, dry, leathery, lasting stuff. The cheekbones appeared flush with the darkened skin. His stomach could digest stones. His swarthy, gaunt head was balanced on a thin muscular neck, while the last vestige of boyhood had left his glance.

New York receded far into the past. The tall structures, the swarming streets, the subway spouting jets of human beings, all seemed part of a story read long ago.

"How long have you left to serve?" Captain Tarvan asked him one day.

"Two years, about, Captain."

"You intend to reenlist?"

"I—" Maguil hesitated. "I guess not, Captain."

"I have propositions for promotion to make. Think it over."

THEN the mobile group came back to reform at El-Mellah—to await reenforcements. Maguil received a few letters from Mae. She was back in the States and said she was waiting. There was a brief cordial note from her father. His uncle Kilpatrick had sent him newspapers. Mortimer Ferdy was forgotten. New gangs were now fighting their little wars. Return was absolutely safe for him. And at the end of three days the replacement draft arrived from Meknes. The buglers played for the new arrivals from the trail up to the camp.

There were Legionnaires, varying in age, type, nationality, physique and social class, but already alike in the coarse khaki. Seventy-odd in number, enough to form two full sections. But they were broken up, distributed throughout the battalion. Two were assigned to Maguil's group. A sergeant brought them in and gave their names, and they were taken into the low ceilinged native hut.

They grumbled a little at the quarters and tossed their packs against the wall. Maguil eyed them without great interest as they moved about in the semi-darkness. Usually, Legionnaires were of good average quality. There was a tall lean fellow who called himself Nestor and claimed to be a Serbian. The other, a shorter man, was Recki, Anton Recki—nationality Polish. Two of Maguil's men, Mignard and Vandrel, took them in charge with the easy comradeship of the regiments.

Maguil left the hut and went out into the cold crisp air. Great red clouds shaped like stumpy pillars made a scarlet colonnade against the gray sky, seeming to support the immensity of fleecy masses formed by white clouds. Against the dark green slopes, the cubical structures of the military post were like dice thrown on a

carpet. Small tents were aligned regularly. The cooks were busy and the wind brought the teasing odor of freshly baked bread, of stewing meat, with the aroma of coffee slashing through like a knife. In an open place, a score of Legionnaires were playing leap frog, yelling and shoving like children.

Mignard joined him.

"We'll probably be off soon, now the new men are here. A fine pair of cocos we drew, Corporal!"

"What's wrong with them?"

"Nestor is a big bluff. I knew him in Meknes. Says he was a colonel in the Serbian army and can't write his name correctly in any language. Talks a lot."

"Good soldier?" Maguil asked.

"Uh—doesn't make his omelets with eagle's eggs." Mignard lighted his pipe and went on reflectively, "Other guy says he is a Polack. There's a real one in the squad and he says Recki can't speak fluently."

"What does it matter as long as he does his job?" Maguil concluded.

The next morning, when Maguil awoke, his companions in the hut—the infantry of the group was quartered in huts abandoned by the natives—were already stirring. Nestor was squatted in the doorway, knees drawn up under his chin, arms embracing his legs. He had a long, keen profile, drooping lids and smoked a pipe with a curved stem. Mignard, back braced against the opposite side of the doorway, was swapping recollections of Meknes with him.

Maguil looked for the other newcomer. Recki was sewing buttons on his coat, squatted like a tailor. His linen was piled neatly at his side. His torso was nude. Maguil first noticed the breadth of his back, the big muscles moving easily under the layer of flesh, a bull-like neck sweeping abruptly to a short cropped skull. On the left arm was a colorful coiling of green and red snakes tattooed around the bicep. On the right, flashing into sight with each pull of the needle, Maguil was startled to see the rippling of the Stars and Stripes.

RECKI threw his coat aside and picked up his shirt. The movement brought his face into the light streaming through the open door. Broad cheeks, narrow sloping forehead, hard little eyes, bluish chin. Maguil was sure he had seen that face before, that he knew the man—one of Ferdy's friends—Jack Siskow.

Feeling Maguil's eyes upon him, Recki turned around fully, looked at his new corporal and grinned cheerfully.

"Good day," he offered. He scrambled across the floor without rising, like an ape, and squatted opposite Maguil. "I see you somewhere before, Corporal. You been Meknes? Tadla?"

"No. Bel-Abbes, Gerryville, Oranese South, here—"

"Never been Syria?" Recki was puzzled. "When I see you first, I think I know corporal. I see him Meknes, Syria, somewhere." He did not speak good French but went on to give his banal little biography in the Legion. "Join up Havre. Then Saida. Then Meknes. Two years ago I sent to Syria. Come back last month."

Maguil saw that he was not recognized. Recki shifted to another topic.

"Me Polack. Varsovia, I was born—" he hesitated. "And you?"

"I'm an American," Maguil said, aware that Recki would soon learn, as he had never made a secret of his nationality.

"Say, you don't speak English?" Recki exclaimed excitedly in English.

"Yes."

"Where you from, Bill?"

"Philadelphia—"

"No kidding. Many's the time I've been to Philly. What you do before comin' here?"

"Shipping clerk."

"I don't mean what you work at, Bill," Recki said confidentially. "I mean what I say; what'd you do? You ain't here on no vacation from college. Don't tell me that."

"Came for the hell of it," Maguil said.

"Not been in the stir nor nothing like that?"

"Not that I know of."

"Just got sick of spinning string and makin' parcels? How many times a day do you wish yourself back, Bill? This's all right, but I liked the Navy better. Yep—Great Lakes Training—then four months on a destroyer during the war. Food no better, I'll say, but the officers don't take themselves so serious."

"What did you do?" Maguil countered.

"I was a Sunday school teacher, see—" Recki shook with inner amusement—"and I stole the church's Bibles. So I came here to make me a man again, so my old mother could kiss me without bein' ashamed of herself when I got back."

"You asked me first," Maguil pointed out.

"Yeh—and you answered first. Lord, it's good to talk human bein', Corporal. There was a Scotchman who had been to Canada and had learned some, but he got sunstroke in Syria and they planted him to grow sweet peas, around that place Alep. Aside from him, and a Greek fellow from Detroit who took the air from Beyrouth, deserted you know, you're the only regular guy I've seen in nearly three years." Recki smiled in a friendly way. "Guess that's why I thought you looked familiar. You're American. So am I, see?"

Maguil obediently examined the colors on the tattooed flag. Recki was utterly, sincerely homesick for his native land, even though his countrymen were waiting to place him in a very uncomfortable chair.

"Say, ever been to New York? Lived there?" Recki propped himself on his elbow and stared into space. "Don't you wish we were walking down Broadway? I'd start off with a stack of wheat cakes and maple syrup. Then I'd have corn on the cob with fresh butter on it. A big slice of watermelon wouldn't go bad, either. After that I'd look up a jane and go to a vaudeville show. I used to kick because they were all the same, Bill. Do you see what they use for movies out here? French and Dutch pictures. Makes you sick; but once in awhile I got to see Tom Mix in a Western. The booze is good out here, that's a fact. But there's so much of it floating around you get kind of tired of it. You don't mind me calling you Bill, do you? Don't tell me you take that corporal business serious? This is a kind of joke army—"

"Think so?"

"I'm talking foolish, but you see, I ain't talked American in years. Tell you what, makes you appreciate a country like ours to be away from it. My old man was a Polack. I was raised in Pennsylvania." Recki's eyes filmed over. "But I know where I'm from, don't worry. I been to France, Bill, and to Paris. You could put all their big houses in the Grand Central Station. You been there? You been to Paris? Full of janes and liquor. They throw everything at you if you have the jack, Bill. But when you're flat, oh, baby, try and get a break; and them there cards of identity they ask for in hotels—" Recki eyed Maguil and paused. "You're a regular guy. I might as well tell you. I was on the lope. Then I remembered about this Foreign Legion game. All booze and Arab janes with a little fighting thrown in. Oh, boy, what a think that was!"

"Sort of different, close to, ain't it?" Maguil helped out.

"You said somethin'. You got a Cross? I tried to get one in Syria. But the slobs seemed to know what I wanted and I didn't get it. Took chances I wouldn't take home for a million bucks and didn't even get a pat on the back."

Anton Recki spilled his innermost thoughts, simple thoughts of simple things: Longing for distinction, craving for alcohol, overwhelming homesickness. Recki, endowed with human speech, was nevertheless an animal; but an animal who might turn malevolent if deprived of what his dull brain yearned for. He had stolen and killed as a beast kills to eat. Here was a fortunate organism in which remorse found no place. Recki passed on like a force of nature, as un-

perturbed over his victims as a torrent is unconcerned with the stones it rolls.

Face to face with the man, Maguil felt little horror—none of the cringing fear of assassination that had driven him from New York. Perhaps his years in the Legion had blunted his sensitiveness. Here, also, they were on equal terms. Recki had a gun, but so had Maguil.

Recki was Siskow, Siskow who had been at large and who had doubtless organized for Ferdy the "execution" of Will Kempton, guilty of treason according to their code. Something must be done, but what? This was neither the place nor the time.

For the bugles were calling the companies to arms. He shouldered his pack, picked up his rifle and took his place in the line. Ten paces away, Recki was standing with the others, a Legionnaire. An officer, the captain *adjudant-major*, stepped before the assembled troops. He read from a paper:

"Uprising in the north. The tribes of the Tadla and Taza regions on the brink of rebellion . . . attack by the people of the Riff . . . Former heroic conduct a guarantee for the future . . . The Legion unchanged and true to itself—Honor and Fidelity!"

The men listened to the crisp phrases, tensely, quietly, confidently. Restless soldiers in garrison life, their hearts could not be broken by hard work and dangers.

"Forward—march!"

The bugles flashed, a brief glint of brass in the light. The companies rolled by like a khaki tide, bristling with rifles. The Legion battalion marched off to its own tune.

"Tiens, voilà du boudin,
Voilà du boudin,
Voilà du boudin,
Pour les Alsaciens, les Suisses et les Lorrains—
Pour les Belges, il n'y en a plus . . ."

Maguil sang the words with the rest. Compact, stern, the Legion sections swept by, at the sturdy, lasting pace that had trod the battlefields of the world for nearly a century.

THE ABRUPT flanks of a ravine dominated the column. The light cascaded on the yellow and ocher boulders bursting through the gray rock slopes and stabbed in the foliage of the bushes.

The battalion marched in lines of groups, three abreast, section after section. At intervals, the slap of a detonation vibrated to them from ahead, brought in through the funnel of the ravine. The mobile group had marched three days, changed direction many times. Perhaps the officers knew where they were; certainly not the men. Far in the rear the general commanding was moving his pieces on the accidented chess board of the Riff. It was rumored that the tribes of the coastal ranges were trying to stab through the line of blockhouses to make a junction with those of the Taza, pick up the Tadla groups as an avalanche gains weight, shut communications with Algeria previous to a determined onslaught on Fez.

If they succeeded France lost the result of twenty years' work, was despoiled even of the miraculous outcome of Lyautey's bold move early in the War, holding the Protectorate with skeleton battalions. Troops from Europe were arriving, *chasseurs*, line infantry, artillery and aviators. But Maguil shared the opinion of the Legion: No matter how well officered, the young recruits from France would need to be bolstered always by veteran colonial troops. More work for the Moroccan Tirailleurs, more work for the Foreign Legion.

As he trudged doggedly along, aware of the weight of the grenades in his bags and of filled cartridge pouches, his thoughts wandered back to Siskow. Had he been right to forgive him simply because he was a Legionnaire, because he had proved amusing and was not the somber, desperate brute he had believed? He turned and glanced at the sweaty, grimed face, the patient eyes and grinning mouth. Recki smiled, called out a few words in English, showed for his corporal a touching, dog-like devotion, because he was an American.

Maguil had him in his power.

The most false among the false tales told of the Legion is the often repeated yarn that it affords a safe haven for criminals. After years of reiteration, the story that there are privates in the ranks whom even Scotland Yard can not nab has become a creed. Maguil had seen men arrested in Bel-Abbès and elsewhere for crimes committed before enlisting. A man who has sinned and paid is safe. The Legion asks of him discipline and bravery. But the common law criminal who has not settled his debt must fear discovery.

At the request of the German Republic, the Legion has given up men guilty of murder. Adolphe Bigoureau and Étienne Laurent had been turned over for a theft committed in France. Antonio Garcio had been sent back to face trial for a confidence game. Vincent and Martin, who had come to the ranks after strangling a Geneva banker, had been extradited. Recki, once identified as Siskow, wanted for murder in the United States, would be turned over to American justice.

Maguil had but to speak a word to Captain Tarvan, who would not permit an assassin to risk death in his company. For, from colonel to private, the Legionnaire is the same. Needless of what the universe outside thinks, they consider presence in the Legion a privilege not to be enjoyed by the unfit.

Still, if there was scorn for the assassin, there was scorn for the denouncer. If outsiders claimed a man, all was well. If a comrade informed, all was not well. Maguil evoked Will Kempton's stiff legs on the risers of the back stairs—four or five young men armed with automatic pistols against one lone old chap. Siskow had possibly been with them. Yet new factors had entered into the case since he had left home. Siskow was Recki and Recki was a Legionnaire, protected from a comrade by his khaki *capote*. Tradition erected a wall of resistance to information; pliable as willow but strong as steel.

Legionnaires came from all races to form a race with customs and traditions of its own. From all creeds to learn one creed. They were bound by a common link, whether driven from a palace by the shifts of fortune brought by war or from a hut by hunger, from society by a prison sentence. They came and took a common destination, a trail they followed without swerving.

They were marching from the past, marching from yesterday.

Few cared to look back, plodding on in the present, forgetting the past, careless of the future. Maguil's yesterday had been the fear of death at the hands of his father's murderers. It was his own, no more and no less sacred than the yesterdays of his comrades. The corporal who had been an officer of cavalry in Russia, the German private who could form a battalion for combat—they marched from yesterday. Unless fate entered from outside and grasped one of their number, no Legionnaire had the right to halt a comrade's march.

Yesterday— Poverty, shame, honor and sorrow, left behind at each turn of the path in Algeria, Syria, Tonkin, Morocco. Each stride was a shovelful of earth on the grave of the past, a past which had its ghosts but no longer substance. Yesterday, sacred to the Legion—often cursed but always sacred. Information from within? No; the code that regulates men living under roofs with full bellies and soft beds did not hold here.

A Frenchman lifted his voice in a teary ballad. The dragging words matched the climb up the sloping floor of the ravine.

In the uneven files laughter fused, hoarse cries encouraged the singer. The last stanza was punctuated by the ripping of automatic rifles ahead—*tat-tat-tat-tat!*

"Halt. Rest," Tavan called.

The three short gold stripes on the captain's sleeve winked with the gesture. Packs were removed, piled on the side of the trail. But rifles were not stacked. The men slumped to the ground or stood wiping their faces, panting. Many moistened their tongues from the felt covered canteens, envied by less sparing comrades.

Moralvi ran up to the captain and they

smoked, chatted. The company commander was explaining something. The lieutenant shrugged several times, laughed,

"There's a salad being mixed for us up ahead," said a Russian private to Maguil, "and look at that thickhead!"

The thickhead was the auto rifleman of the group, who had taken his weapon apart and was trying to put it together again. Maguil knew the weapon well. He sat down beside the unhappy man and set to work.

"What's wrong?"

"Barrel doesn't fit."

"Boob! The top screw is twisted. And your hammer's down. Give me your A kit." Maguil made the needed substitution in two or three minutes, reassembled the Madsen weapon. Then, mechanically, he passed his soiled hands over his face, picked up his discarded *képi*.

He rose and saw Recki gaping at him five feet away.

"I got you now, Bill," Recki said.

"What d'you mean?"

"I know where I see you before."

"No kidding."

"Yeh. There was something kinder familiar the way you fool around with your hands. I seen you fixing plugs a dozen times on *his* car. You smudge your face and I spot you right off. You're the kid of the old fellow that got bumped off, ain't you?"

"Yes."

"Peter, you used to call yourself."

"You've got a good memory, Siskow."

"That's why you acted kinder funny. Didn't need to. I wasn't there that night—already on my way. I got to admit, though, I knew it was coming off. D'you know anything about Ferdy, kid?"

"He went."

"Smart guy! Always said nobody could get the goods on him, you know. Lost his nerve after shooting that cop and made me shoot him, too, so I'd be in on it with him. Last time I'll work with a guy who carries a pocket comb." Recki was perfectly at ease, lighting a cigaret. "Bet he squealed on the whole bunch. Well, kid, what are you going to do?"

"Do?"

"Turn me in? I had an idea I was all right here until they nabbed a guy in Syria—Dutch gink who had walked off with his boss's dough. You already wrote about me, I bet?"

"No, I didn't."

"Why not?"

"You wouldn't get why not."

"Sure, I would. You've lapped up that guff they spill around here about us bein' little brothers together, you bein' the sort that would. But that won't last long. You'll get to thinking of the way your old man was bumped off and change your mind." Private Recki shrugged. "You don't need to be scared of me. If I tried any rough stuff, they'd shoot me. And I ain't sure but it's a lot better to go home. It's been a long time since that cop got his and they ain't out for blood now. Maybe I'll draw down life. That wouldn't be so bad, with good chow. I've thought of going back myself, just to get home."

Recki looked dumbly off into space. Maguil stared at him in astonishment. This spiritual cripple filled him with the identical, disgusted awe that a five legged calf would inspire. A murderer and a patriot—soullessabout having killed, proud of the tattooed flag on his arm. He did not know right from wrong, was straight on only one thing: America was his country. Rightly handled, in the right place, Recki would have been a hero; willing to go to prison for life, if only that prison was on American soil!

"WHAT a dumb guy Ferdy was," Recki resumed. "We had a nice honest business and if he had stopped and talked turkey with that fool cop instead of losing his head, everything would have been O.K. and above board. But what's the use of going over that, kid?" Recki uttered a laugh that was near a giggle of excitement. "Out of luck, that's all. What are you going to do?"

That was a logical question, Maguil admitted. There should be no temporizing. Yesterday was no longer personal but held in common. Again he found it difficult to feel proper horror toward the monster, the killer. He was not even sure that he hated him deeply. He had learned that men are what they are, most of them without definite opinion of themselves. Yet, Will Kempton had died. His adopted son could not forgive, would not forgive.

Perhaps the solution lay in meting out justice himself. This would be easy for him in action. Yet, as the thought seeped into his brain, he knew that he would not carry it out, for he was a soldier, not a killer. In Siskow how much had the soldier superseded the killer? Very little, to judge from his speech and manner.

"Here's what we'll do," he said at last. "This group is out for a couple of months more, the way things are shaping. There's a chance in four that I'll stay out here somewhere, a chance in four that you will. We must allow for extra casualties, you understand, as they all say this Riff business is going to be even tougher than the Middle Atlas. So there's a fifty-fifty chance that one of us will die. You know why I've got to turn you in, don't you?"

"I knew—and I didn't tip off your old man. Go on, kid."

"You could have saved him, yes. So if we are both alive at the end of this trip, I shall communicate with the New York Police."

"At that, you're giving me a good break, kid," Recki admitted.

"And myself, too. I hope it will be you who gets it. Because you sure have it coming to you for all the rough stuff you've pulled back home. I don't want to have to squeal on you. It's not pleasant, even when a fellow has a right—a duty—to do it. Get me?"

"You bet, kid. Though, if I'm as lousy rotten as you think, ain't you scared I'll put something over on you, quiet-like? You're a big guy, a corporal, and I follow. See?"

"A bullet in the back?" Maguil asked calmly. "I thought of that. But it's this way, Siskow. I was just a kid in New York and your gang got me to running and I ended up in a mess. I've learned one thing—never to run. I'm not scared of anything like you when I have a gun in my hands and I'm free to use it. To tell you straight, that's partly why I'm letting you go this far. You got my goat once. Now try and do it. You'll miss me sure."

Recki looked at his corporal thoughtfully.

"I know what's the matter with you. You've got *it*, too."

"What do you mean?"

"That 'nothing-can-kill-me' stuff. I've been watching you and I see it plain. It's great when it works. Now, in Syria—"

A strident, imperative whistle interrupted Legionnaire Recki's campaign reminiscences. Packs were slung; the company moved away.

Without visible reason a nervous febrility skimmed from one end of the slender column to the other. Privates fixed bayonets without being ordered and were loudly berated by irate sergeants. The sides of the ravine slid lower into the sky, indicating an open plain within a short distance, one of the many, tiny, cutthroat valleys pitting into the mountainous regions. Along one of the crests, silhouetted black against the limpid sky, Tirailleurs were deploying, the tiny dot of the head surmounting the larger dot of the torso, the line of rifle and bayonet sharply defined.

Lebels fired everywhere, while the intervals were filled with the more remote crackling of Martinis, Mausers and Remingtons.

"Beni-Khaled opposite us—" a voice rose from the ranks.

No one questioned this information; no one asked how the speaker knew. Was any ear keen enough to distinguish a particular battle call in the din of clamoring voices drifting faintly down the wind with the fusillade?

"Halt," Captain Tarvan cried once more.

The company grounded arms and waited for developments. A long file of mounted native auxiliaries trotted along their right, squeezed between their ranks and the bushes. All faces turned upward as a big plane roared overhead.

Maguil had forgotten Recki, his mind concentrated on a small group of officers not fifteen paces away. Captain Tarvan was a little too calm to be sincerely easy of mind. Moralvi trotted back and forth like a terrier on a leash. The major commanding the battalion had come up on foot. He was a big, clean shaven man of forty-five, a round, meaty body planted on thick columns of legs.

"They've placed *chasseurs* to hold that line," he was saying, "and you'll see that we'll have to mend what they're doing. Foolish to put those kids up there; they're scared of the Moroccans."

"You are right, Major," Tarvan said soothingly.

"Your company goes first. But it can not be helped, Tarvan. An ass could have seen that the line will have to be humped over to hold at all."

"Yes, Major, yes," Tarvan assented meekly.

A mounted native auxiliary came trotting toward them.

He was in full regalia, shoulders to knees draped in a blue cloak, over which a pearl gray scarf had been loosely flung. Head bound in a white turban circled by a crimson band, he had a very dark, bearded face, thin lips and aquiline nose, lighted by blazing eyes. A long furrow of blood scarred the rump of his gray horse. Blood oozed on the sleek flanks where the spurs had dug.

"*Ala souj del kiloumitre men ladoul*" he spoke volubly.

"Says we're two kilometers from the enemy, Major," Tarvan translated.

"Ask who sent him."

The dialogue crackled between the captain and the messenger; sharp, definite, impulsive on the part of the native, slower, deliberate words from the officer.

"Captain in charge of Tirailleurs. The enemy has pushed back the *chasseurs*. Looks as if their line on the crest was breaking under massed attacks."

"What did I tell you, Tarvan?" the major exclaimed triumphantly.

"The captain sends word—" Tarvan went on.

"That we'll have them on our lap in another twenty minutes if we don't move up. It's elementary, obvious. Did he inform the colonel? Yes? We have to wait, then. No, here comes the order." The major took a slip from the runner, flicked it open. "That's it. Go on, Tarvan—you're to join the lower line, protect the retreat of the others. After that, all is in the hands of Allah. You'll get new orders."

Tarvan slid to the ground, threw the bridle to an orderly.

"Come on, at the double—"

The entire company trotted forward, meeting wounded men on the way, hobbling to the rear. A new voice clamored over the fields and hills, reverberating, deep, the batteries of 75's unleashed at three thousand meters range. The ravine opened up abruptly, the company deployed, strung swiftly forward, formed by groups. Ahead, isolated, small detachments of infantry. Far ahead bushes and a tall pile of gray rock against the sky. On that slope, little knots of troopers in khaki patches, and other knots rolling behind them—the enemy. Everything scattered, confused at first glance.

The beginning of a Moroccan battle.

"Halt. Fix bayonets—forward—"

The old story . . .

CHAPTER VI

THEY MARCH

CAPTAIN TARVAN'S company reached the firing line improvised at the foot of the rocky hill to hold back the victorious mountaineers who had dislodged the French troopers from the crest. The enemy was in sight everywhere now, flitting in small groups from shelter to shelter, creeping steadily nearer.

The *chasseurs* who had retreated were

reforming in the rear, young fellows of less than eighteen months' service, bewildered by the outcry of indignant sergeants. The Legionnaires opened fire with the automatic weapons, while a section of the machine gun company attached to the battalion rushed up and installed its pieces. They were professionals of strife and worked with the calm skill of sailors in a storm. Bands were already jerking through the breeches, and clusters of brass bullets caught the scattered knots of natives. Where groups had obtained elbow room from enthusiastic foes, the dull crashing of grenades resounded.

Maguil, despite the tumult, noted a definite difference between the men opposing the French forces today and all those he had encountered before. One could not say that the Riffs were trained according to European standards, but they were certainly better led, better handled than the mountaineers of the Atlas range. There were even a few machine guns operating from their side, probably taken from the Spaniards on the opposite slope of the mountains. And one was soon conscious of a directing spirit, of a mind which sought and found weak links in the defensive cordon flung forward by the French and directed attacks against those weak spots.

Any sector of a battle front held by the Legion is known to be strong without further test, by all intelligent commanders of all breeds. Resistance before Tarvan's company melted instantly, while the onslaught shifted to a section of Senegalese on the right. Corporal Maguil, aiming and firing quietly, took time to turn his head. The other companies of the Legion were plugging gaps. On the extreme right, another rolling khaki line was progressing, obviously not of the Legion but moving with commendable precision and spirit.

"Who are those?" he called out to the nearest sergeant.

"R. I. C. M—battalion of them brought back from the Rhine."

Regiment of colonial infantry of Morocco—a red *fourragère* unit, the Legion's closest rival—brought back from the army of occupation. The situation in Morocco must be serious. The Moroccan colonials managed to push at right angles to the rest of the line, and the fire of their machine guns crossed that of the Legion. The shells of the artillery dropped a few hundred yards ahead, making pretty pillars of maroon hued smoke mingling with dark earth. Chieftains of the Riff were shouting instructions.

"*Lellour—lellour—eljmey—*"

The warriors obeyed with reluctance. They much preferred an enjoyable exchange of shots at three hundred meters to longer range fighting. But obey they did, reforming behind rocks and bushes. The downpour of shells leaped to nose them out. The sun was hot and Maguil reached for his canteen, found it very light. He restrained a desire to empty it completely. In the field water is almost impossible to borrow or buy. It sometimes sells at fifteen francs a cup—more than the cost of vintage wine.

"Pick your men, Legionnaires," Tarvan advised. He was on one knee beside his sergeant-chief, who was flat on his belly.

A private near Maguil was hit—evidently well hit. He turned over on his back and Maguil could see his hands fumble to part the coat and unbutton the trousers. Fingers groped beneath the whiteness of the shirt, reappeared stained. A comrade was applying a first bandage. The artillery slackened; shells dropped with deliberation. One, two, three and four, in a neat row. Often, when luck had served the gunners, fugitives would radiate from the point of impact, screaming.

Recki was five meters away, *képi* pushed back from his tanned forehead, lips parted and moist, cuddling the stock of his Lebel. He was not elated but was not obviously uneasy. He caught Maguil's glance, moved his head in a queer sidelong gesture and grinned. He spat thick and white. He was thirsty. Near him was Nestor, self-styled Serbian colonel, screened behind three large pebbles and a

bush a foot high, mumbling constantly, praying or swearing.

"—*ette—on*—"

The syllables stood for *baïonette au canon*. The bayonets, momentarily back in the sheaths, leaped into clear light once more. Tarvan, Moralvi and the other section chiefs gestured. A bugler gasped two or three panting notes, then settled into the regular call—the charge. Three long bounds brought the company upon the skirmish line of the enemy. Maguil slumped behind a Moroccan corpse. He turned from this uninteresting offal in yellow and white rags to look at the crest of the hill. The slope seemed endless. Surely they would not send the company all the way up.

A thud, another, a third on the left; word was passed from mouth to mouth that the natives were using home made grenades, sardine cans filled with metal scraps and explosives, fired by a slow burning wick. Maguil had heard of them before—not dangerous over a wide area, but nasty to have drop on one's back.

"Forward!"

He had the disconcerting certitude now that he would have to reach the top. The major had predicted it; the move was needed to straighten the line of action. This time there was a brief flurry of hand to hand fighting, knives, butts and long sticks against bayonets. Maguil caught one of the blows from a *matraque*, the club used by all Moroccans, on the barrel of his rifle, and tried to stop the native with an upward swing of the butt. Too late, the fellow whirled and was off in goat-like leaps.

Another wait. Shells passed above the front line to explode on the very crest, goal of the next bound. Maguil turned and counted his men. The automatic rifleman of his group and one of the purveyors had dropped out at the start to join in a supporting fire.

"Where's Vandrel?"

"Sat down, Corporal. Guess he got one."

Maguil turned to look back. There was a sprinkling of khaki on the slope they had ascended, but which one was Vandrel? A kneeling man was waving the company's *fanion*. A lull in the combat followed—both sides taking breath. Recki slipped near, very earnest.

"Even a bottle of near-beer would go good, eh, kid?"

"You said it."

"Know what I've been thinking all the way up?" Recki held his rifle ready but spoke without tremor in his voice. "Know them signs they have against the windows in soda fountains back home? Pineapple temptation, banana split, peach Melba? I used to think a quarter was a lot for two lumps with a little cherry smash on 'em. What wouldn't I give for one!" Something attracted his attention; he turned his head. "My sidekick from Meknes caught one on the potato that time. He walks to first."

Maguil crawled to Nestor.

"Where are you hit?"

"Left side, under the collar bone," Nestor replied. He spoke in a choked, oppressed voice, like a small boy answering a teacher. "I'm afraid it's gone into the lung. In my kit—at the company's baggage—you find—so—"

The Serbian's head lowered gently, rested in the crook of an elbow. He seemed to have dozed off. Colonel or not, it was all one now. Mignard, who was practical, came over to take away the dead man's grenades.

"Useful," he explained. "Say, if they stop us here much longer we can have houses put up and plant cabbages for spring. Do they really think they're killing anybody with those shells?"

Maguil looked toward the crest again, four hundred meters at most, and only the very edge was occupied, so that the explosives simply dug useless pits and flung rocks about at random.

"Forward—"

Maguil hurdled bodies, crashed through shrubs. Then a wall of natives leaped up bruskly, grenades flew through the air, the few automatics with the attack sections played like hoses. Instead of shredding and vanishing, the mob came forward.

The two companies of Legion detailed to storm the hill had counted three hundred and fifty men at the start. They counted three hundred now and were halfway submerged at the first onslaught. If they kept open order they would be butchered in detail. Maguil fell back toward the *fanion*, formed one of a strong group surrounding Captain Tarvan, who ordered them to fire three volleys to obtain breathing space.

"Fall back on the last position," Tarvan ordered.

He was very calm, had only fired his revolver twice, when needed. To remain, one against fifteen or twenty—more natives were appearing in a steady stream from the lee side of the hill—would have been insanity, bad warfare. The commander wanted Legionnaires on the crest of the hill, but wanted them there alive.

THE WITHDRAWAL was operated by the two companies in a series of islets of soldiers, beaten by the flood of attackers as a reef by the ocean. Maguil stumbled in striving to pull his rifle from the grasp of a Moroccan, and Tarvan fired a third shot. The club aimed at the skull swerved as the man fell, struck glancingly at the chin. Maguil saw crackling wheels spinning and swirling but kept his feet. A fall here was comparable to a tumble into a meat grinder; for beyond the front rows of blades and clubs hovered mountaineers eager to rip and hack at the fallen.

The speed of the retreat accelerated, but the Legionnaires could not shake loose their opponents. They went down the slope together, an avalanche of flesh. Human endurance is limited and Maguil felt with growing apprehension that the time was not far off when the knot of Legionnaires would break up and leave isolated men naked before their foes.

"Steady," Tarvan shouted. "All goes well."

It was the first time Maguil doubted his chief's word. All was not going well.

"Bear left—we can make a junction with another group. Reenforcements are arriving—" the captain's conscience annoyed him obviously, for he added—"I hope."

They bore left as best they could, but it was a crab-like progress, two steps forward, one back, one up, one down. The whole mass swayed like one body. It seemed as if souls and clay had amalgamated, that the thought of one was the thought of the other, that the slaying of one man sent a quiver of pain through the whole. Maguil could feel the group growing weaker and weaker as a man feels the strength leave him when blood juts from a severed artery. He had no time to look right or left, was pushed, stumbled, struck and parried, while panic gnawed at the base of his brain, a longing to drop his rifle, to chance it alone, to run through the scattered natives down the slopes.

"Steady," Tarvan called. "We're getting there."

The chief's voice pierced through Maguil's panic, soothed him. An atrocious terror gripped him that the voice might be stilled, and the group slain by the death of its commander as a man is slain by a bullet through the brain.

"*Tlâhm—tlâhm!*" The shrieks of the Riffs *Mequddims* invited the natives to closer combat.

They had decoyed the companies within striking distance and did not intend to release them. One more stroke, Maguil felt, and it was over—no, one more and another. He would not drop as long as the captain was alive. Yes, there was his voice.

Then Maguil believed himself dead. His skull seemed to swell and burst; his bowels shook; his lungs burned. A rolling as of thunder shattered his brain from ear to ear, with a strange, deeply sonorous, oscillating vibration. He was still alive—there were the Moroccans, very near—again that tremendous sense of shock, a hurricane of sounds, whistles, screeches; something moist pattered against his face. He was pushed forward by a falling

man, recovered, using the rifle as a prop.

An explosion farther away revealed the truth. Maguil was undergoing his first moments under shellfire. The 75's were dropping salvos into the confused mass of Legionnaires and Riffs. Those behind had seen that the companies could not possibly unhook from their assailants and were breaking up the avalance by a judicious distribution of percussion shells. In fact, the whistling shrieks of the flying steel cooled off the Moroccans.

"Retire steadily," Tarvan advised gravely. Even shouting he could maintain dignity. "Keep in good order, Legionnaires—we're being watched."

The last words had a marvelous effect. The true Legionnaire is a dandy of conflict and prides himself on his behavior at all times. The group deployed as on a drill field and opened fire on the fugitives. Ninety-five years of tradition backed their effort. The Legionnaires, emerging from hell, broke into a hoarse shout, not a cheer, but a savage grumbling of satisfaction. Maguil recalled his job, a small job, but nevertheless a part of the organism. Four men left; Mignard, two others, and Recki.

Captain Tarvan thanked the sergeant who reported the present strength of the company.

Ahead, the situation had assumed its original aspect. The enemy occupied the crest of the hill with a line of sharpshooters. The space between contained many more heaps of flesh and cloth—the sole change. Maguil ascertained who had fallen and who had returned. His eyes sought for sergeants, adjutant, lieutenant. Missing, present, missing, missing—the non-coms had lost heavily, as usual. Lieutenant? Where was Moralvi? Nowhere in sight. He could not believe at first that he had dropped. Moralvi seemed one of those men who always come back.

"Where's the lieutenant?" he asked a sergeant of the section.

"Up the slope."

"Dead?"

"Probably."

Maguil groaned. His eyes swept the field swiftly, then more deliberately, lingering, seeking Moralvi.

CORPSES marked the progress of the several groups of the Legion which had made their path down the slope. The dead of the companies were visible enough; there had been no opportunity as yet to strip them and mutilate them. The native dead, loose garments tumbled by sudden falls, exposed startling nudities. The sight was not pretty. Here and there, in the sprawled heaps, a man stirred, a head, a hand lifted. Instantly, from the edge of the crest, a Mauser slapped.

Maguil recognized familiar shapes, familiar features. Often it would be only a small area of face, the brow, the line of cheek to ear that showed. His fascinated eyes swept on in imagination. The big man who could drink a liter at a draught on a bet. The little sergeant who would have gone to military school for a commission. The *adjudant* of the second company, best hated man in the regiment—now answering for his sins.

Some of the dead concealed their wounds as if in shame, huddling their hands over a ripped belly, cuddling a broken skull in the lining of the *képis*. They had come from all corners of the earth. Their goal was now reached. There lay bodies that had received their first wounds on the battlefields of the five continents. The Portuguese who had fished for pearls in the South Seas beside the German youth who did not like to study.

And Moralvi—Maguil first recognized his laced boots, then the bulky body. Then two short stripes of gold above the seam of a cuff. The lieutenant had his head turned away toward the enemy, but was hidden by several native dead. He was less than two hundred and fifty meters away.

For long minutes, Maguil lay prone, shading his eyes. Moralvi was coarser in speech than Tarvan, grew angry easily, cursed a good deal. But one felt rare warmth and understanding under the

roughness. Maguil computed the oases of safety between himself and the lieutenant. A dash to a row of bushes, another to a sheaf of dead. It might be done, but it was not worth trying unless Moralvi were alive. Then he saw the officer's hand stir slightly, a mere twitching of the fingers, a caress of the soil in an uneasy, futile gesture. Maguil nodded grimly. He had felt him alive, out there.

He reached Captain Tarvan's side.

"The lieutenant is up there. Can I go get him?"

"I've lost enough. The Moroccan Tirailleurs lost eight men the other day bringing in a dead captain."

"He's alive—"

"Alive? Wait. I'll get the glasses. Where? Yes, I see him. He does not move. Nothing doing, Maguil."

"I saw him move, Captain."

"Sure?" Tarvan lifted the glasses once more. "You'd stay there, little one, for a dead man. God! He is moving. We must get him back. We can't leave him there, and the order may come to withdraw."

"I'm strong enough to bring him in alone, Captain. May I go?"

"I can not ask you to do that, Maguil."

"You're not asking me. It's a matter between us two. He's a friend of Lieutenant Pavert."

"Yes, I heard something of that. Sergeant, lend Maguil a pistol."

Maguil stripped himself of pack and bags, of cartridge pouches. He tucked the automatic handed him by the noncom inside the blue sash. He handed his rifle to Mignard.

"Where you going, Corporal?"

"To get the lieutenant."

"That's a military medal you'll earn and won't collect. Need any help?"

"No."

Maguil left the line, crawled forward to the first shelter. He was not noticed from above. He took breath under the bushes. The next stretch of thirty meters had to be done in the open, within three hundred meters of the snipers. He did not allow himself to think too long, but rose and ran, hopping from side to side. The surprise was complete and in a few seconds he was sheltered by corpses.

Tack! That was a Mauser. *Tack-tack-tack!*

Maguil, who was hidden, wondered what they were firing at. He turned, and saw a Legionnaire running, head down, arms high, like a man pushing his way through driving rain. Then Siskow threw himself to the earth like a sack of wheat. He had brought his rifle.

"Say, what's the big idea, kid? Where're you goin'?"

"To get the lieutenant."

"You ain't crazy, are you?"

"You never can tell—"

"Come on, let's go back."

"No, they'd think I'd lost my nerve."

"That would be a cryin' shame, wouldn't it?"

"What are you doing here, Siskow?"

"Same as you."

"Who sent you?"

"Nobody. Where you go, I go. That was the agreement."

"No, you damned fool."

"Fifty-fifty, you or me. Where does that fifty-fifty stuff come in if you do things like this alone? Wouldn't be fair and you know it."

"Shut up and go back."

"No. What I was and what you was—that's to be settled when the time comes. Right now, you're the only guy I can talk to and say anything. You hate my guts, but you speak English, see? Well, we can't stay here all day."

"Moralvi's on the left, somewhere."

"I know it. Was with his bunch on the way down."

"Let's go."

Maguil rose and launched himself forward, dropped, breathed, ran again. The persistent *tack-tack* of the Mauser followed him. Siskow reached Moralvi at the same time, by a different route. Together, they turned the lieutenant on his back. He was half conscious and smiled when he recognized Maguil. His white lips moved in an attempt to speak.

"All right, Lieutenant, take it easy," Maguil said.

He searched for wounds. There was a hole in the chest, but the real harm was a long gash in the groin. The lieutenant moaned. Siskow passed over his first aid packet, then watched Maguil.

"They sure dished him up in style, kid. The minute we pick him up, he'll blow out the gas. Can't do much repairin'. Needs a new chassis, don't he? How we goin' to get him back? Ain't human to pick him up by that game leg."

"I'll get the captain to set the machine guns going against the *bicos*. They'll cover up. Then you hoist him on my back and do what you can to keep them from coming after us."

"Fine. How'll you get the Old Man to turn the juice on? Got that telepathy gag worked out?"

Maguil knew that Tarvan was watching him with the glasses, and moved his hands stiffly in front of his body, imitating a machine gunner. The answer was immediate and the crest was raked. There was a slim chance that the hidden snipers would be confused by the spouting fire.

"Come on, Jack."

Siskow stood up courageously and hoisted the lieutenant on Maguil's back. With his right hand, Maguil grasped both hands of the officer crossed on his chest, reached backward with his left hand to grasp the cloth of the coat. The legs hung limply, the feet kicked him in the calves.

"All aboard, kid!"

Maguil lumbered down the hill with his burden. He trotted on as in a dream, watching his comrades in the distance. The machine guns before him stopped firing, but those on the flanks kept on. Fifty meters, sixty, seventy—seventy-five.

Suddenly Maguil yelped with pain and tumbled into a hollow with the wounded man on top of him. Excruciating pain tore at his nerves. His left hand was a bloody mess.

"Here, put a handkerchief around it," Siskow advised. "Hands hurt worse than hell when they get busted, don't they?"

"The lieutenant, Jack."

"He's gone by-by. The bullet went in his neck after bursting your mitt. Look under his chin where the thing came out!"

"We'll get his papers and decorations, then." Maguil stuffed the wallet and the medals in his pocket as Siskow, who could use both hands, handed them over. "Come on."

"Right with you."

Tack! Tack!

They galloped down the slope. Then Siskow seemed to slip and fall. Maguil heard the rifle clatter on the stones and turned his head. The man was down. Maguil thereupon moved back and lay at his side.

"Hit?"

"How'd you guess? Sure."

"Where?"

"Don't know. Can't say. Feelin' all limp. In the back. Beat it."

"I'll carry you. Come on."

"With your bum hand? Can't be done. Anyway, you ain't got the right to help me. Wouldn't be decent. How would it look for you to carry me in, then turn me over to the cops?"

"I—wouldn't, now."

"What about your old man? Yeh, it's too bad, ain't it? Better go. That guy's getting real hot with his shooter. Hand me my rifle, will you?"

"Listen. I can't quit like this."

"I kind of got to like you, kid, but you're dumb in your way. Even if you get me back, you'll be sorry later. Push that gun over here. That bird shows himself when he pops at you, and I'll let him have it in the kisser, see what I mean?"

Maguil shoved the Lebel into Siskow's hand. He crouched near a moment longer, with a horrible longing to grasp the murderer's hand. He did not.

"We'll get you on the way up, Jack," he concluded.

"So long, kid—"

Maguil rose and ran. Two dull detonations cracked up the slope. The bullets sang by. Then, much nearer, came the dry report of a Lebel. The

sniper fired a third time. Siskow had missed evidently. Maguil slid into the shallow trench hastily dug against possible counter-attack and reached Tarvan.

"The lieutenant died on the way. I have his papers."

"I'll send them in to his wife in Saida. And tell them how they were brought back and who did it. What was the name of your comrade, Maguil?"

"Recki, Anton."

"New with the company?"

"Last draft, Captain."

"Friend of yours?"

"Knew him in America."

"Reenforcements are on the way up and we'll attack soon. If he had waited fifteen minutes, he could have been picked up."

"He's waiting. Didn't want me to try and bring him back."

"I saw you wanted to help him. He shot himself as soon as you left."

"Shot himself?"

"Afraid of being caught alive. Too bad. Work your way back to the ambulance and have that hand looked after. The field will be ours by nightfall."

BEFORE reaching the foot of the hill, Maguil heard the bugles of the Legion sounding the charge once more. Groups of *chasseurs*, groups of colonial infantrymen were on the way to support the companies. Maguil turned and saw the double white rockets go up all along the crest. "Objective reached" they meant. Such was the luck of battle. Had he left Moralvi where he had fallen, the lieutenant might have lived to be picked up. It was most certain that Siskow would have lasted longer. But then, he, Maguil, would have gone forward with his group in that onslaught and might be among the newly fallen.

Luck? Destiny?

The sanitary planes were plying between the field and the base hospitals at Meknes, Taza, Fez. But there were so many cases this day that some had to wait. Maguil's hand was dressed hastily and he ran back to hover in the rear of the combat which did not end until long after ten that night. In the morning the companies of the Legion who had taken the hill marched to the rear. Captain Tarvan came to the ambulance to converse with the wounded. He drew Maguil aside.

"How's your hand, Maguil?"

"Nothing new yet—bones broken—"

"You said you had met Recki in America?"

"Yes, Captain."

"I was watching him through the glasses after you left. He moved with perfect ease to place the muzzle of his rifle in his mouth. I was curious enough to have him stripped. He bore no other wound. I can not understand it. Had he any cause for suicide—concerned with the Legion, I mean? A captain doesn't always know all that goes on—"

"Recki was homesick, Captain."

"All right." Tarvan looked at Maguil keenly, changed the subject. "I have recommended you for the Military Medal. There were so many witnesses to what you did yesterday it's sure to be granted. Drop me a line, tell me how you're getting along. And if your hand mends, come back to my company. I'll fix that for you. Good luck, Maguil!"

When the military surgeon bent to look at Maguil's hand the index finger and thumb were untouched, but the three other fingers were stiff, almost useless. The bullet had fractured small bones, severed nerves. Taken by plane to Meknes from the field hospital, Maguil had remained there four months, then had wandered from hospital to hospital in North Africa, as Legionnaires do. Casablanca, Oran, then Sidi-bel-Abbes once more, then back to Oran. Meanwhile he had received two letters from Pavert, who was in the Tonkin, at Wietry. His former lieutenant assured him that he had written to the commanding colonel, that all that could be done for him would be done.

"What is your profession, Maguil?" the doctor asked. He added with a nod at the medals and a quick smile, "In civilian life, that is—"

"Automobile mechanic."

"You have how long left to serve?"

"Something over a year, Major."

"Have a cigaret." The surgeon sat on the edge of the cot beside Maguil like a friend. "We have done our best here. You will regain the use of those fingers in time, but you'll have to apply yourself to certain exercises. Not likely to handle machine tools—it's dangerous with stiff fingers lacking feeling. You're good for a year yet in hospitals if you remain in the Legion. It's a deadening life, and I'm ready to facilitate an extended leave for you to spend where you wish."

"Even in America, Major?"

"Yes. You can't resume active service for six or seven months; then you'll have a leave coming to you. Take No. 2 discharge without pension and it'll go through quickly."

"I'll ask for No. 2, Major."

"You'll be better off there, for the present. If, after your fingers are pliable once more—they will be—things do not work to suit you, come back to us. Many do. Individuals change while the Legion remains."

And then, later: On the right, Gibraltar. On the left, Ceuta, Spanish Riff, spread white against the green, with its fringe of domes and minarets. Beyond rose great rounded knolls, stark, grim against the cloud laden sky. In a few minutes, night would close down and the African Continent be lost to sight. On the vessel that bore him homeward, Peter Kempton, once Maguil, looked back with vague yet poignant grief.

Friends, comrades, chiefs, dead and alive, left behind. Moralvi who had died and Captain Tarvan who still lived—and Pavert—merged in the one epic background of yesterday.

The PARODY BULLFIGHT

By

MICHAEL J. PHILLIPS

IT WAS Saturday afternoon in Santa Barbara, California, and the whole populace trudged or rode horseback to the area in front of the De la Guerra house, the plaza once named for old Don José de la Guerra himself, but now called Plaza del Toros—Place of the Bulls. For, as regularly as Saturday afternoon came, a bullfight was staged on the plaza. Not one of the bloody conflicts of Spain and Old Mexico, but an adaptation of Santa Barbara's own, in which there was little bloodshed but much fun.

The dust was thick in the plaza that hot summer afternoon in 1865, but, *hombres*, you would not object to that—no? Is the earth not softer when you fall?

First came the bull, a wide horned, thick shouldered fellow with thin flanks and a devil in his eye. Tied to the horns and flopping musically on his forehead was a canvas sack. It contained silver contributions from the crowd to the amount of forty dollars. The sack belonged to him who could get it.

The plaza was an oval perhaps fifty yards wide by seventy long. A high fence surrounded it. The rabble clustered on rude grandstands built up against the fence on three sides. The quality stood or sat on the porch of the De la Guerra house. On that side of the oval was the gate through which contestants entered, and there was no stand to obscure the view.

It was all old stuff to the bull, since he headlined regularly every Saturday.

Pancho, a local wit, was master of ceremonies. Ironically he introduced Yogo, a squat, awkward Indian from the old mission. Yogo the stoic advanced seemingly without fear. On his left arm was the brightly colored *capotillo*, or shawl, which was used to challenge and confuse the bull.

This bull knew all about *capotillos*. He charged at full gallop, swerving as Yogo swerved. A gasp from the audience, a flurry, a snort, and Yogo was hurled twenty feet from the horns of the bull.

The Indian alighted with a solid thud. The dust puffed up about him. Gone was stoicism. Yogo scrambled to his feet with a yell and, amidst Homeric laughter, fled through the gate held open for him. He headed for his cabin at the old mission.

El Toro did not deign to follow. Instead, he stood in the center of the arena, tearing the *capotillo* with his horns.

Yogo had entered the arena hoping to get the purse of silver. But the next fighter came from a different motive. He was one of the young aristocrats of the *pueblo*. He was magnificently attired, and he rode a good horse.

Over his left arm he wore as a *capotillo* a Paisley shawl of red and black. Waving it aloft, he bowed deeply toward the De la Guerra house and shouted:

"I fight to the honor of Señorita Carolina Jimeno! I salute Señorita Carolina Jimeno!"

On the porch of the house a pretty young girl smiled and blushed, while her companions rallied her gayly. This was the señorita, and out there was her knight, with her shawl as his shield.

Again the bull charged like a halfback. The horns caught the horse broadside, and down went the startled animal, to roll over and over in the dust. Luckily the rider fell clear. But also he rolled like a barrel.

The bull vaulted the prostrate horse and rushed at his humbled foe. The young *caballero* ran nimbly to the fence and climbed to the top. There he perched, while again the crowd howled.

The third fighter entered on foot. His eye was on the money bag, but he also was a cavalier, since he bore the shawl of Señorita Francisca Gutierrez. He advanced bravely enough until the bellowing red catapult was almost upon him. Then he lost courage and fled.

A sweep of the horns all but tore his trousers off. Burning with mortification, he wrapped the shawl about him, hobbled out of the gate and boyishly hid his face in his arm against the wall of the De la Guerra house.

Mirth which his plight evoked was cut short by the throwing open of the bull ring gate. El Toro had vanquished three foes. His task was finished for the day.

That is, nearly finished. For the sack of silver still bobbed enticingly from his horns. The crowd of young men and boys rushed up and made futile snatches, springing back to avoid his threats.

El Toro seemed to realize this was another phase of the game, and he made no murderous rushes. He trotted peaceably through the lane which opened for him, brushing off his tormentors with a "live and let live" air.

He had almost won El Estado, the principal street, when young Ramon Pico, the baker, caught him by the tail and, swaying back and forth three times, gave a sudden jerk sidewise and downward.

It was a trick which called for the expenditure of little effort, but it threw El Toro as neatly as he had disposed of his enemies in the ring. He went over on his side. With a shout the baker's partner, Juan Gomez, leaped astride the bull's neck, cut the sack loose with his knife and dodged into the applauding crowd.

The successful Pico released his hold, and the bull trotted off to his pasture. Then Pico sought his companion.

"Juan!" he shouted. "I am here. Come on with that silver."

The crowd was enjoying its last and biggest laugh. For Juan was standing treat to all comers, leaving by the back door when scouts warned him that Pico was about to enter by the front. From saloon to saloon Juan went until every peseta of the prize was spent.

The TURN *of the* TIDE

The story of Cain, the Weasel, to whom nothing was impossible except fear

By F. ST. MARS

IT WAS not easy to understand exactly why Cain had trekked into that place, unless you know the abiding restlessness of the weasel people, in whom the longing "to see behind the ranges" is almost an obsession—and a costly one.

It is, however, quite easy to understand what Cain was doing there—hunting, of course, he being a weasel, and one of Nature's official executioners, licensed and armed as such. It seems absurd to speak really seriously of an executioner ten and a half inches long, five ounces two drams in weight—scarcely more than a fat letter—but to the weasel nothing is impossible except fear.

He was certainly some beast, and those people of the wild who valued him at his size and weight were likely to wake up one fine day with their spirits in the next world and their corpses in this world.

You see him, Cain, in the watery afternoon sun, leading his little force—his wife and four well grown young—along the top of the old sea wall where the lone wind sang all day long through the teeth of the glaucous marram grass like a long draught, and the wild ducks' wings whistled with the wind of nights. Autumn had touched their coats with her own wonderful smoldering brown, and when they stopped to sit up their spotless shirt fronts flashed white.

It was sheer madness and worse for them to risk their flat heads in the eye of

day—moonlight was bad enough—or to come there to that salt and seaweed scented scene, where they did not belong at all, but the spirit which sent Queen Bess's adventurers across the Atlantic sent them there.

And all were supremely happy too. New sounds, new scents, new sights, new victims to slay, new foes to fight, new dangers to face, new battles to be won—what more could a weasel, the most instantaneous beast in all the wild, except the black rat, want or, wanting, get?

A spear—as it were the very foot-long blade of a M'sai or Zulu chieftain—hurtled through the wind at Cain. That it did not pin him, quivering, to the buttressed chalk wall, where he stood all among the sea spinach and the soughing marram grass, was because he was a weasel and had learned to act on as much margin of warning as we human beings should call none at all.

But that, with the owner of this spear, was not enough; more was required. If Cain had not been an animal, a mammal, if you please, he would have looked up before the stroke and seen that the wielder of that shaft was the gray fisher of the waste, even Jack Heron, the thinnest and longest of all the local wild folk; and if there is anything that Jack Heron prides himself on more than the suddenness of his first lunge, it is the rapidity of the second, third and fourth, and more to follow. Nothing, nothing that he knew, had ever stayed to experience that—and lived.

But the weasel stayed—or rather to the naked eye, strictly speaking, he did not. He practically vanished from sight. He became, in the snap of a finger, not a beast, but a wink; no longer a weasel, but a blur, a possible haze, a something or nothing, a *whirr*.

But he was there for all that. In fact, he had never moved more than twice his own length from the spot and, in the voice of sober fact, had simply jumped backward and forward, returning each time upon himself, for all I know, head over heels, but certainly backward and forward, a living shuttle worked at indescribable speed, and the heron's beak had landed between jumps every time. It was a staggering exhibition of lightning movement, and a white light upon the sinister reputation of friend weasel.

But if you think the other weasels were doing nothing but retreat all that while, you do not know the little beasties. They belonged to a tribe which is famous in the wild for just two things—courage and chivalry. They did not desert their leader, that family. For a space they vanished momentarily, popping in and out, like disturbed ants, behind the stiff frosted grass, under the marsh samphire, around the crawling roots of tamarisk, beneath the chalk lumps. But always they came back, always closer in, and then, quick as light, they attacked from all quarters, and so quickly that, though he ran his beak clean through the forearm of one of them, the heron was kept perpetually dancing a grotesque, ungainly, absurd flapping can-can. And at last he heavily took flight and wafted his long, light, thin self to other spheres, croaking in a voice like the clanking of damp dungeon chains as he went.

The weasels resumed their march unabashed, but there was no food in that place, it seemed to them, save a very dead guillemot stranded among the piled seaweed and the gravel.

Here it was—close to the carcass, as you may be sure—the weasel's mate found a crab or rather, to be exact, the crab found her. A new experience. And meanwhile, in trying to find out what in whiskers his mate was doing stunts over so small a foe as that shore crab for, Cain himself stepped upon a buried clam, who promptly shut up and retired downward, squirting up a jet of muddy water into Cain's face with such good aim as to remove him about one foot in one-tenth of a second, blindly swearing.

Cain, the weasel, was beginning to learn that he was in a land new to his experience and that heaven knew what might happen next. Another beast might have turned back, but Cain felt he must go on.

Anon, Cain climbed one of the waving, feathery, pale mauve-bejewelled tamarisk bushes, or trees—call them which you like—that seemed to mark high water in these parts. He was a fair climber—better than people think—but it was no easy task to climb those wind polished stems that crawled like snakes, anyway.

The wind made a faint, soft soughing among the foliage, and there was the tinkle of running waters somewhere, where a drain gave out on to the open estuary. And the wind and water conspired between them—or perhaps it was strong, glaring daylight and the clean ozone in the air—to send Cain and his family to sleep, curled up in hollows or crooked arms of the bushes.

THERE seemed to be no interval to Cain between these things and his awaking, with a start, and the instant, complete consciousness of all the wild people, to the realization of night and the noise of waters all about.

Cain peered down and beheld slopping, lopping water. Cain glanced inland and saw mist-like water running out in sheets. He turned shoreward, and there, far out, were waves. Everywhere in the distance, and near in the channels, was water and, like miniature mangoes, the tamarisks would presently be standing in it.

Cain got up, and every hair along his back stood up with him. This scene, this picture wherein the calm moonlight doubled itself, represented high tide on the saltings, but what did the weasel know about tides?

He opened his thin lips to call the others—the weasel as a rule is strong-mindedly dumb—and shut them again in haste.

The moon is a treacherous jade and a real coquette. She revealed to Cain a blotted shadow busy with a pile of mussels. Apparently it was indulging in a cold fish supper. Equally apparently it had gathered those same mussels there in that spot for that purpose, which meant many journeys out over the mud ooze when the tide had been low. But what that blot was in public life, or by what name men or weasels might call it, the moon did not reveal. And having displayed so much, as if in sheer wickedness, she—the moon—dodged behind a cloud.

Then the weasel fell into a channel and swam ashore farther on. He could not well do anything else, for he had found himself, with that disconcerting suddenness and quietness with which things happen in the wild, looking at what one might term point blank range into the eyes of several rats. They had presumably climbed the tamarisks to identify him. One was the owner of the mussels.

Now what is there so disrupting in a weasel's finding himself suddenly face to face with rats, seeing that the same whiskered rodents, at any rate in the young and less devilish stage, are normally part of his legitimate and official prey? Which is quite fair to ask.

But these, my friends, were shore rats, and I tell you that they do not admit of comparison at all. They are, I think, the descendants of those vile things which have been thrown out of and excommunicated from rat society as too disgustingly awful for even those nameless vermin, and you can take it from me that what rats will not put up with is so abominable as to be beyond a name.

In two minutes, swimming as easily as he had climbed, Cain came to the sea bank again, where it was clear of tamarisks, and the clean, free wind of heaven struck the face like a douche of clear water. He climbed out and shook himself—for all his disproportionate length of body, and lack of length of sturdy legs—like a tiny model of a bear, and so absurdly so as to be almost laughable.

He turned to move on, then suddenly wheeled upon his hind legs. For the first time, in his excitement, it seemed he had remembered his family again. He sat up upon his hind quarters, making a miniature watch tower of himself, and the cheat moon peeped out from behind a heavy cloud bank and showed him doing it, and showed, too, that in that position he was even more absurdly like a very

miniature bear—when a bear does the same thing—than ever.

Then the moon switched off, and the darkness swept across the face of the waters, and blinding sheets of rain, heralded by howling wind, followed the darkness, and all was shut out in black confusion. And Cain came down on to his sturdy forepaws and returned, not by the way he had come, but along the top of the sea bank, doggedly, slowly and grimly, to rescue his family.

He dived in among the sinister shadows beneath the tamarisks, and there followed instantly the sound of trouble and all manner of uncouth noises.

Then, still with that swift deliberation they teach in the navy, Cain arrived out again upon the top of the open sea bank, all in the clean, refreshing rain and the tearing, cold wind, driving his mate and his young more or less before him.

One of his young, a daughter, faltered and fell, even as the moonlight peered out to watch her die, which she did, bitten through the jugular vein, with great promptitude. Also one other, not of his kind, but a lean, scarred and mangy rat—driving forth with the rest, not because it wanted to but, in the heat of the argument, whether it would or no—died also and almost as quickly, with Cain's little, glistening canines, keen as rapiers, buried in the back of its neck.

Then the procession of the weasels began again, continuing its march, as it had come, in Indian file, like a party of head hunters. And the first thing Cain stumbled upon was a hare, which got up out of the darkness, and was represented by one rustle and two thuds, and nothing else, and was gone.

Cain and his folks took two hours in tracking that hare through the wayward moonlight, in and out among the polished steel marsh pools, along pebbly stretches strewn with seaweed and the finest gravel in the world, till she pulled down, screaming thinly and pitifully all across the night, and Cain administered the *coup de grace* with his usual scientific precision, and—oh, horror!—another unspeakable shore rat appeared like a hyena at the sound of the death squeal.

Now, although there was more upon that hare than Cain and his whole family could possibly eat, they made no pretense at doing more than merely sipping like connoisseurs and looking elsewhere. Whereby within fifteen minutes after leaving the poor carcass lying there stark in the moonlight they were as hot upon the trail of a rabbit, which had evolved itself, ghost-like, from a sea spinach patch and fled bobbing into the night, as if that hare had never been. And that, by the way, is your weasel all over.

In many ways the weasel tribe—which is a big one, and comprises the ferret and others—is more bear-like than anything else. But in the chase the weasel is essentially hound-like. And the chase is with the weasel not a profession, not a means of getting his livelihood merely; it is a religion, like fox hunting with some Englishmen and Irishmen.

NOW RABBITS get about at night far more than many people imagine. They are here. They are there—places where you may not find them in the daytime. They explore everywhere. "What is a rabbit without a run?" says some one; but they go to places where there are no runs, at night anyway.

It is necessary to explain this because that rabbit ran straight into the estuary. She dissolved into the wan moonlight like a wraith. No, like a bobbing dim lamp, for it was her tail one saw clean away over the reeking, green scummed mud. An otter could hardly have done more.

But the weasels did not care. They guessed that where she could go they could follow; and it was characteristic of them that they never stopped to consider where the end might lead them. They were on a hunting line, following a screaming scent, running a trail. Only that they knew; all else faded out. They became blind, deaf and insensible to all else but the chase.

Cain, by virtue of his position as head of the family, led. His disproportionate size in comparison to his mate gave him the legs of the lot; but it was she who puzzled out some of the more difficult checks; as for instance, when the rabbit ran in a maze through what I call water grass and lost herself, and when the rabbit crossed a gully where the running water had broken the line, and again when, upon a higher flat, the wind had blown the scent fifty yards away parallel with the real trail.

And all these things mattered. Cain would inevitably have been slower in the end without her help, but he would not have lost the line or given up. Weasels never lose anything—except their lives.

Very funny they looked, too, out there in the cold light, strangely odd and absurdly small. They appeared, indeed, diminutive on land, but upon the vast, desolate, elemental floor of the tide, over the wet and shining, moon washed spaces their ferocity was odd. It was as though Nature joked with herself.

But there was no joking in the faces of the weasels, nor yet in the rabbit's pop eyed stare. Death hovered behind Nature's playfulness, as he ever does.

At last they came to a really broad water channel, such as there always are running out—or in—upon the estuaries when the tide is down. And this must have been really quite far from land; though, not being versed in the hour of the tides, as all the shore folks are, the weasels did not know it.

This channel they crossed by jumping from an old stranded fish basket to a lump of rock, to a raised hump of gravel, to a pile of sopped weed, to a half buried spar, as the rabbit, who seemed to know her way, had done, and finally, when there was nothing left to jump to, by swimming.

And then it was that they learned the difference between following in the tracks of one of the shore folk across what would seem, for a weasel, a perfectly negotiable estuary, and not following in them.

The drift of the out-hurrying dark salt waters carried them farther than they anticipated. They had, like a novice airplane pilot, not allowed for the drift, with the result that they landed a little farther downstream than the rabbit had landed. But a little, on the mysterious mud ooze of the estuary, is quite enough to get, as they did, nearly bogged.

Casting forward and back along the water's edge, they picked up the trail again, and the crazy hunt through a desolate camouflaged world of moonlight after an apparently mad rabbit staggered on. It was a weird picture.

They came to a place where the rabbit had run, zig-zag fashion, through a sleeping flock of black headed, common herring gulls, as the hare hunted by harriers races through a flock of sheep.

The gulls were still there when the weasels arrived, five hundred of them more or less, and they got up, a good few, and made dolorous noises; and the weasels learned how, with their wing beats alone, a flock of sea fowl can mob even that terrible atom, the weasel, nearly to death. If it had been daytime instead of night, the *nearly* might have become *quite*.

Anon, also, the rabbit's trail suddenly took a turn at right angles on the edge of what looked like a particularly firm piece of slime. Cain, who was leading, did not turn so suddenly. He overran the scent. Next instant he all but overran his life also and, before he knew where he was, floundered in mud of the consistency of butter on a July day.

By the time Cain, biting hold of bits of dank weed and using even a much annoyed shore crab as a foothold, had squirmed himself out of this death, he was in a very vile temper indeed. Yet it was characteristic of the weasel in him that the only effect of so being was to make him more doggedly, obstinately determined to go on with the hunt than ever.

And Cain followed hotfoot after his eldest son now, who had gone forward unchecked.

Soon they came to another channel, wherein Cain was able to regain, if only in part, at least some of his customary immaculate self-esteem.

That insane hunt continued. Half an hour later, Cain, happening to look round by chance, or for some unknown reason—unless it was the sighings and the lispings, the mutterings and the whispers that began to invade the dark—beheld the tide.

The tide was tracking them, hunting them down, trailing them, treading on their dapper heels. And the tide was inexorable and fast.

Of course, neither Cain nor his mate had considered the tide; not, indeed, knowing anything about it. They considered it now, however.

What the weasels saw was a sheet of molten silver stretching out behind them as far as eye could reach, and beyond.

Then they ran for it, but, being weasels, Providence had decreed that they would run for it in probably only one way—upon the trail. They would not give up that. And it saved them, for otherwise they, not knowing their way, would certainly have been hopelessly bogged in one or other of the soft places and ignominiously drowned out of hand.

As it was, they reached an island, an island for which the rabbit had all along been making, a low, flat affair covered with nothing but grass, and as they flung themselves down panting on the shingle beach, the steely, clutching, cold fingers of the making tide were only six inches behind them.

When Cain had recovered himself sufficiently to walk without appearing drunk, he explored, and discovered one fact. The island was apparently inhabited solely by rabbits; heaps and heaps of them.

Then Cain discovered another fact. It fell upon his mate out of the night, and without a warning sound. Apparently it had been accustomed to live upon rabbits, and had taken things so much for granted that it had not troubled to verify upon whom it was pouncing.

Cain saw this; saw his mate squirming in agony, lifted into the air bodily in the claws of a thing with great round eyes that burned bright as the eyes of a cat, and—Cain never hesitated. He fairly raced forward. He leapt high and wriggingly. He grabbed hold. He hung on.

Then the thing howled. Howled, I say, more diabolically than "the wolf on Unalaskar's shore". It dropped Cain's mate. It grappled him, and as it grappled with talons like tiger's claws, it rose, and steadily uprose, flapping into the night.

But Cain, little Cain, was only ten and a half inches long; and this awful, pitiless bird, who was a short eared owl, was sixteen inches—yet Cain would not let go. Not he, little daredevil, dogged beggar that he was!

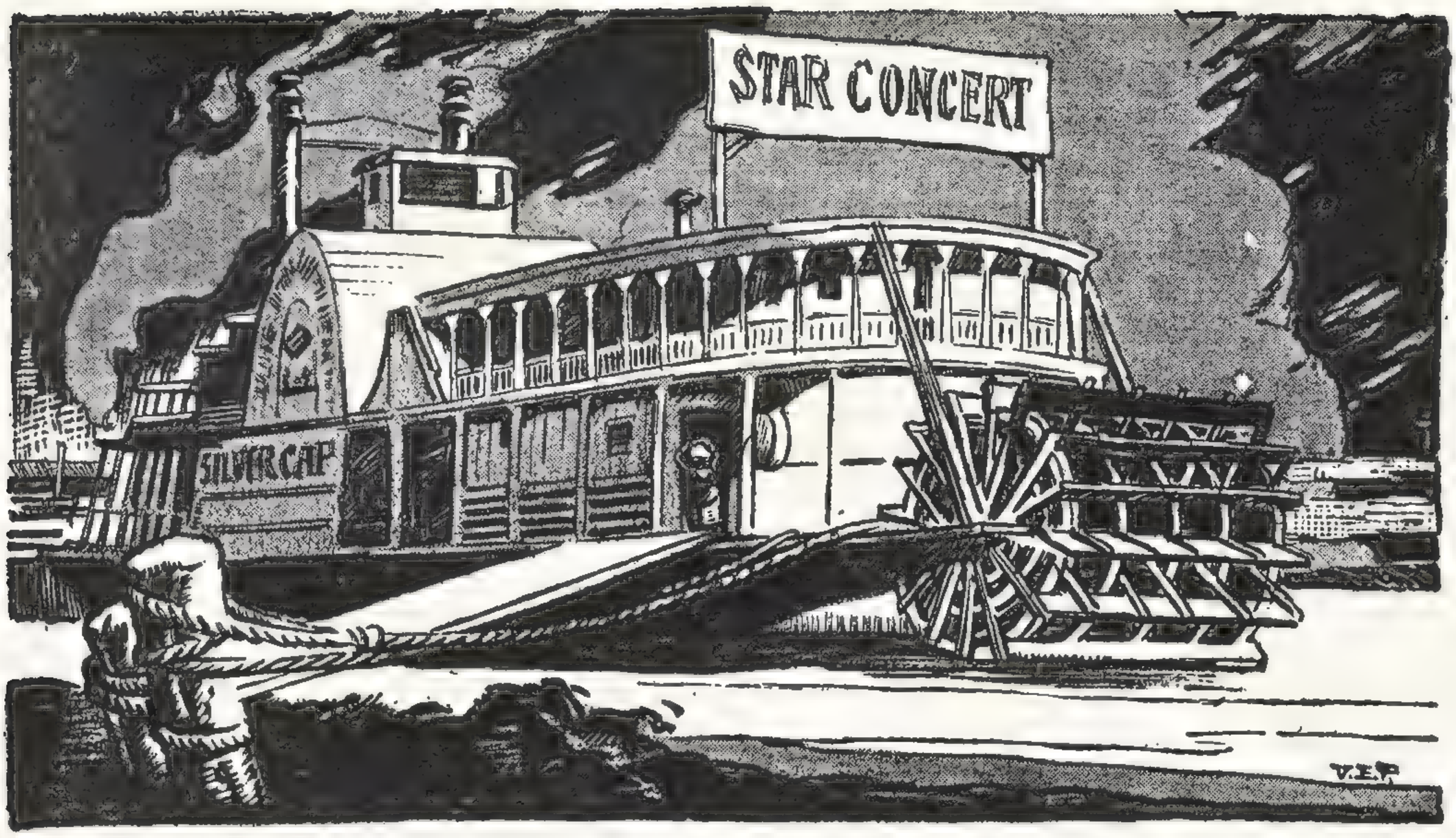
He hung on. Pierced through, he hung on. The light fading from his sharp eyes, he hung on. Foam, and at last blood, gathering about his grimly locked teeth, he hung on. Blood pouring down his beautiful coat, he hung on. To the last—he hung on.

And four hundred feet up, the big owl screamed one last awful, nerve torturing scream, and fell, strangled almost to death—*thomp!*

And Cain's wife, though badly mauled, ultimately recovered and lived to be a terror to the rabbits and a thorn in the side of the unspeakable shore rats.

The short eared owl, too, got up, and flew staggering away, and never came back, and he also, after long suffering, recovered.

Little Cain, that pocket demon of the wild, never recovered. He had saved his mate, but Fate claimed him. When his wife, his absurdly tiny wife, went to pick him up by the neck, as a cat carries kittens, and drag him to a place of safety, he was stone dead! The fall, or the owl, or both, had killed him—Cain, with his jaws still locked in death, and full of feathers, Cain the beggar that never put his hands up and never would have surrendered even if he could.



A Tale of the Old Mississip'

LOSING A GOOD RIVER COOK

By RAYMOND S. SPEARS

ONE TIME something funny happened on Old Mississip'. Chessie Rolands, who came down from Marietta on the Ohio, was so kind of lonesome from Cairo past Hickman and so on that she let two fellows come courting her. One was Mack Stoven, the market hunter; and the other was just one of those men we know nothing about except his name, which he said was Rutt Queeze.

Everybody knew Mack. He had followed the ducks down every autumn migration for six or seven years. He made good money—though the Federal Treaty Law-ers caught him about every so often.

This other fellow, Queeze, rubbed the bank and sported along, squandering as if he had a full money belt.

Chessie was with the *Silver Cap Concert Boat*, which showed pictures. Mr. and Mrs. Pattern ran that boat, making good money, and all Chessie had to to do was look after the kitchen, which was not any job at all. And naturally, being with the Patterns, she was real respectable.

Of course, Mack Stoven, since he was hunting, was not a fair weather sport. The higher the wind and the worse the

storm the better he liked it. Ducks come in low and geese move close in on those mean, blustery November days. Mack was busy in blinds or sneak-boats when the northers were stepping down the Bottoms, roaring in the hollow trees like calliopes.

Rutt Queeze just naturally anchored close in when the weather was rough, and visited Chessie on bad afternoons. He had the advantage, if he knew it. Nobody comes to a show boat if the road is wet across the Bottoms, making business dull. Also, after a hard day of shooting, Mack had to tote his kill to market, right off. He did not trust the game wardens not to come nosing in unexpectedly to pick up five hundred dollars in wild fowl fines.

In fair weather ducks and geese hang out and do not fly much, so Mack would hand around the *Silver Cap*, with his sneak-boat, skiff and trunk-cabin cruiser lying idle on their anchors. In this fair weather, Queeze would rub the bank. He was selling some graft, probably "'lectric belts," as some said, though some rumored that he had a private and confidential line that he was not giving away. Anyhow, you can see how one having a fair weather up-the-bank business and the other having a cyclone gale river proposition, sort of provided for Chessie. She sat back in the concert boat kitchen, with no time for being lonesome or unengaged.

Now as to the particulars, some details were naturally obscure. Unless you were right there yourself, not much was plain. Chessie, of course, has told me a right smart of the ideas and happen-sos, and some are plumb ridiculous.

Came a spell of right changeable weather, just before Thanksgiving. That year the Louisiana oysters shipped up the Mississippi were tasting mighty sweet, and they were cheap. We could get milk anywhere and stew them. The way Chessie made an oyster pie, browned in the crust, and spiced in the solid meats with a juicy gravy out of the shell liquor—huh! Or, she would fritter those oysters in hot cottonseed oil, so that if you put a keen catsup on them—ho, law!—there was no restraining a visitor's appetite. You see, Chessie fed any one of those fellers who was courting her.

Personally, the most exasperating thing I know of is courting a good cook. Tending to business, she hops around, and just when she is getting interesting, up she hops to stick a straw into the cake or sip the soup, to see if it is time to sift in the pepper or dust in the sage or any of those particular seasoning feats a good cook always has to do when she has her wonders to perform. And then when one is just sitting there on the edge of the chair, waiting for the knife and fork and the hissing spoon performance, she comes along and plops herself into one's lap and you have to wait—maybe ten or fifteen minutes more—on account of the wild goose bake needing another sizzle in the basting, or likely the raised dumplings in the squirrel kettle are not quite done in the middle yet.

Now Chessie was just that kind. She was nice and plump, as a good cook should naturally be—or will be some day. When she sat on a man's lap, he knew it. A good cook is never too heavy, but always weighs say, a hundred and thirty in the early courting age, and if she is particular, probably is a hefty one hundred and fifty by the time she marries. And when she comes to about two hundred, you can say she has reached perfection and is in her prime.

Spindly shanks are not an Old Mississip' failing. 'Course, some appear and go like the moon, new and slim, middling and plump, and in due course fade down into lanky thin. But if she knows what she is about, a good cook is real popular. The fat ones keep agile handling the sweeps, and the gaunt ones are not so good in storm and stress—not but what they probably have their good points, though I am not experienced as to that.

Mack Stoven and Rutt Queeze courted from around Cairo to near the St. Francis, following the *Silver Cap* down. Both were satisfied, for Chessie always did manage

well. A girl can, if there are no accidents.

Of course, something is always liable to happen. You never can tell when. On a dull and threatened day the up-the-bank worker may hesitate to go out and the duck hunter may figure the day is not worthwhile, as the fowl are not traveling. That was the way things broke. It was a weather breeder day, and Queeze came back early, while Stoven allowed he would not bother to hunt that day. So they both came wandering in on a Saturday evening about four-thirty, arriving into Chessie's kitchen with no warning or premeditation. For Chessie it was embarrassing.

Just who to bet on was a problem. Chessie had a roast goose in her hand which Stoven had brought her, and he had his arms around her, claiming what a buxom cook with twinkling eyes and sweet lips pays according to inclination. Queeze had stopped uptown to buy enough solid meat oysters to make a pie, have some raw and cover a flapjack griddle with crisp fries. So that was that, and they went at it.

Just let me say that two men properly heeled for self-defense and a lady with a good voice can fill the fading late candlelight of a sacred concert boat galley kitchen with noise, confusion and plenty of excitement. Lots of men visiting ladies do not expect trouble. I have known forehanded but polite fellows who just naturally carry their guns everywhere, except when paying a courting call. Oh, of course, if they expect to meet somebody else there they are not careless. But when they sort of feel that they are hanging around a quiet eddy that they have owned for a long time, they just take things for granted.

Mack Stoven was an old riverman. One time he was caught on a whisky boat, the *Klondike*, at Slough Neck, below and across from Winchester Chute—completely naked and barehanded as regards protection. Luck was with him. The Williams' speedboat had just passed by and the swell hit the *Klondike* with a short, choppy uppercut and she lurched. The fellow who was just beginning to open up was drunk for one thing and the dip was unexpected for another. Stoven hoisted a table all covered with cards, chips and a round of drinks. It hit this fellow and confused his aim long enough for Stoven to get the fellow's pants with one hand and his neck with the other and throw him through the window feet first. That was the first time I ever saw a man go out that way. He swam into New Madrid down the bend four miles.

Stoven said then that he would pack a gun if he was the invited guest of the Mississippi River Hottenpoppers on the Government yacht. And, of course, he meant "let alone a first class cook in a show boat kitchen." So he had his gun. This Queeze, whom nobody knew, was not a slouch, either. If a man has never heard two men with four guns shooting with enthusiasm in a closed room shantyboat he has missed something. Personally, I was up the eddy about a good duck shot away. It was just like listening to somebody hammering a bass drum fifteen feet in diameter. Law me! That was the loudest shooting I ever heard, leastwise down Old Mississip'.

It was funny, too, the way those bullets splintered out through the sides of that concert boat kitchen. Some plunked through the canned goods on the shelves and one carried something right through the boards. My land! When those bullets came skipping and whimpering by my boat up the eddy I let go my dignity.

ALL OF A sudden the popping and booming stopped. So did the yelling with which Chessie had punctuated the excitement. I felt sick. I hurried right up the bow deck gangplank and, just as I started in, somebody came out of the dark. Night had fallen, and all was black and gloomy. But I knew it was this fellow Queeze. He jumped high and landed on the bank. He did not need a gangplank. He circled over to his packing board box of a boat, while I headed into the kitchen. The Pat-

terns were up the bank that evening. I arrived in the kitchen, just in time to hear that duck hunter heading for home in his skiff, the outboard wide open and roaring.

I struck a match and there was Chessie. I was mad. I lighted a lamp and looked around. Chessie had been up the bank awhile before and she had had about two dozen assorted cans and jars on the table. There she lay on the floor, and three or four bullets had messed into those condensed milks, peaches, catsup and one thing and another. When a .45 rams into a sealed tin can, lots of times something happens! That ceiling was dripping condensed milk which had exploded upward. I looked back at Chessie and I felt sick.

The Helton-Ives log camp was over in the edge of the Dark Corner logging off the timber brakes especially for exports in gums to ship to Liverpool. I jumped ashore and headed for there to do the telephoning. You know, when anybody is acquainted with crimes or murders, the sheriffs and chiefs of police, like Clancy at Helena, and Hardin down at Arkansas City, and Haddams at Memphis, like to know about the fracas. So I called up Clancy first.

I told him the whole story, all about this market hunter, Mack Stoven. The minute I described him, the chief knew him by sight, and it seems they had him booked to the Federals on account of his being a promiscuous and habitual law breaker as regards wild bird hunting, contrary to our Canadian agreement.

Queeze, though, was not so well known. His name was not listed, nor was he an actively suspicious person. He was one of those sharp featured fellows with a pointed nose, bright dark eyes, a chisel chin and fox ears. As soon as he headed out it was into the cane brake; but a couple of negroes set him across the St. Francis about two miles above the mouth and he started for Crowley's Ridge, which was a mighty good clue. That showed he was up-the-bank, and not a natural river rat.

"Now about this victim of them two," the chief wanted to know.

"She's Chessie Rowlands," I told him. "She's cook on the *Silver Cap Concert Boat.* You must remember her, Chief!"

"What's that? The *Silver Cap's* cook? You mean that gal which cooks wild goose'n' shoat cane rooter and game fish bakin's?" the chief shouted, and I could see he had caught the point.

Of course, lots of those big fellows up and down Old Mississip' had eaten Chessie's cooking. In my own excitement and disturbance I had overlooked how famous Chessie was. The chief had not. Lots of times killings do not cause much excitement, being just kind of so-so. 'Course, when a man's been sheriff or police chief or something like that, after awhile just ordinary things sort of come along and pass by, commonplace and without much disturbance except among the immediate relations—but if Chessie Rolands was more or less killed up, that meant upset equilibriums. The Patterns were great hands to have people—quality folks or regular people—come in after the show to eat Chessie's oysters, or a Louisiana crab salad or those funny little dinguses that cook red and kind of look like sandworms—I disremember their names.

Anyhow, you pull off their heads and boil them, and after chilling, you pour on a cold, sour gravy—salad dressing I think it is—and probably they have two story sandwiches and cakes and pies.

The chief had seen the point, fast enough. Probably nobody would miss good eating on the *Silver Cap* more than he would. He just fairly boiled. Probably I never really appreciated Chessie, the way up-the-bankers regarded her, till I heard the chief begin to rear and saw the way he took hold, declaring he would attend to the whole business, notifying, rewarding and ransacking.

So, accordingly, I headed back, stepping light, to the *Silver Cap.* There the Patterns had arrived right in the middle of the whole business and could not figure out one blamed thing that had taken place. They had been upset finding Chessie the way she was and about two dozen bullet holes from the inside out

through their kitchen cabin walls; dishes, canned goods and all sorts of stuff punctured and mingled together. They knew that there must have been one Hades of a time there recently, but the excitement had calmed down to just the splashing drips where things were running down and a smell of powder smoke.

Naturally, so much having taken place, they could not figure the sense of it, so I came in and told them I was doggoned if I wasn't official. They knew that already. Just for luck they had tuned into Helena radio broadcasts and they heard the announcer telling everybody everything that had taken place in their own kitchen. That was funny. They had seen the ruins, but not the cause.

The radio explained the whole business to them. They heard me echoed all over creation as "the well known river trader, Hiram Besswick, who reported the affair." I was just as well satisfied that the announcer did not tell what I generally and exclusively traded in, my customers being mighty particular. I'll tell the world the wild honey in St. Francis Cane Brakes is sweeter flavored than any I ever tasted, because of the blossoms thereabouts. And naturally my boys never use any but the best white hill corn that is to be had. This yellow corn is nowise near so flavored and reliable. Insisting on that white corn is why we did so well by our trade.

Then, another thing, I do not let the corn sprout too long before I have it ground in pumice stone buhrs. Soft stones give a gritty taste to corn meal, and personally I don't believe in alkali in my sour mash. I may be funny that way, but it does not hurt anybody, being particular does not, especially making 33-66% honeydew.

The Patterns were able to make quite a lot out of the radio, though it was acting up with the static and a storm poised for pounding down; they heard that Coroner Smith-Morey had deputized me temporarily in charge, because a storm was coming fast, and there might be some delay in the regular officials' arriving on the scene. The barometer kept its promise about the time I came romping in, worried about the feeling in the air. Sheet lightning was turning to chain. Low growlings were drawing near to be a right howling rumpus. We were nervous, for those things are often just tornados, fighting the trees and tearing everything all to pieces.

Naturally, being official, I made kind of a little ceremony about taking charge of things. Anybody appointed as I was has to be dignified.

Then the storm came a-humming and a-rearing. The Patterns ran out to look after the ropes and make sure that the windows were all open so the suction would not explode the cabins; those light headed storms pull the air all thin and sometimes the pressure inside blows up a cabin like a paper bag.

I looked at Chessie and all of a sudden blamed if she was not looking at me, winking. Who-e-e-e! I never was so relieved of trouble in my life before! So, being official, I just naturally picked her up gently and toted her over on to my boat, to give her a chance to ease up on the strains she had been under, coming out of a faint into playing 'possum. There hadn't been any other way in sight for her but to collapse when those two fellows took her resources of lonely hours so blamed serious.

THE THUNDER and lightning ripped and rolled by. Static, so fierce before the ruction, now settled along into night calm, in the rain. The Patterns sat there listening to the broadcasting, all stirred up. They could hardly believe they had all of a sudden grown to be so important. They heard "Money Musk" music and special bulletins about the man hunt. Helena Jubilee sang "We Won't Go Home Till Morning," terribly pathetic, and then a special bulletin came down from Mendova, which said the big wind had done some damage and two posses were driving down Old Mississip' in two big motorboats to cover lonely

bends. They had figured that if Stoven had not gone down the river, he would scout into the dark corners in the Centennial Chutes above Memphis. Chief Clancy had not neglected any bets or chances to hedge on them.

From experience I had known something about official strategies and the way they swing out their post guards, drag the Bottoms, pick up the questionable and the suspicious; but sitting there and having such a personal interest, I tell you it was something to listen to—all those bringing in the dogs and organizing the posses—all started up by me.

Telephones rang in with information. Commissaries and plantations were interested; along Crowley's Ridge they had sentinels posted. From Helena down to Greenville they promised a hundred men any time a steamboat landed. Every time the ferry crossed, armed men had their guns ready for business. Every road, every trace and the levee backs were being watched. We three just sat there listening for the shooting every minute, sitting on the edge of our chairs. 'Course, I just had to find out how the land lay, now.

They picked up a lot of nondescript hell-raisers here and there, as they would of course. The Halfmoon County boys ran right smack into a fellow wanted two thousand dollars' worth by relatives of his deceased, up the line. They only had twenty men to split it, so they drew a hundred each for their enthusiasms.

I was in a pickle. The rain pouring down and the wind blowing were nothing to the way I felt, being uneasy and growing more dubious all the time. You see, lots of those up-the-bankers are mighty sensitive about us river rats, and sometimes they think we are liars on purpose. They never consider how a man might lie by accident, not meaning to do it. They all knew me. Lots that I had never had personal dealings with had heard of me.

It was said right out on the radio that for a riverman I was reliable and generally honorable. 'Course, I had kind of a record; lots of people did not believe the same as I did; but at the same time the way I attended to my business and so on had established me for just exactly what I was. There had been a time when my wild oats raised quite a crop of tares and quack grass—mentioning my medicine business real delicate like that, so only my friends and acquaintances would understand—but for some time back I had been braced up and my relationships were satisfactory with all concerned.

Here we had just about one of the hullaballooest man hunts any one ever read about or listened to, and the wilder they went the worse off I saw I was. It was no time for me to sit and figure. On the river a man really never gets nonplused completely; or anyhow not until they have the rope knotted under his left chin and the sheriff asks him, consolingly, if he has anything else to say.

Of course, with that rain sluicing down, nobody would come across the Bottoms to us, even on horseback, but I knew what to expect next day. Chief Clancy would ride out, curious; the coroner, the sheriff, and probably many of those planters who had been riding all night, holding the watch guard lines so as to catch whoever had spoiled a good cook they knew.

I had described murder in that kitchen duel between the market hunter, Mack Stoven, and that bank rubbing grafter, Rutt Queeze. There I had the principal victim sitting in my boat. The two fellows—one up the bank and another somewhere on the river—were both alive and probably only shot a little at the worst.

I knew it was just one of those things this Old Mississip' had framed up on me, the way the breaks always come to a river ratter. I had a big business, growing bigger, more indispensable and important, getting richer all the time, and here comes this trifling little messing around of a couple men shooting each other and missing, not landing one good shot into themselves at all. I *had* to mistake a lady's fainting and some tomato catsup for murder, or leastwise suicide, on

account of a good cook running day and night courting shifts, with two or more quick tempered friends who do not know each other. A lady who does such things takes long chances.

Anyhow, I know the symptoms when Old Mississip' frames a fellow. That scoundrel river just wanted to see me sit and squirm, or step lightly, watching over both shoulders while on my way. My land, if I didn't wish I was a character in a book, whereat is the last place any one, knowing me for what I'd long been, would be looking for me.

So I went to my boat, which was now dark. Chessie being kind of tired an' sleepy, after all her experiences, had gone to bed so as not to lose too much rest. Well, I went in, impolite and excited. I told her which was what, the pickle I was in, being official and so on. The government was holding me responsible for her *corpus delicti* and all the posses were certainly going to hold me responsible for their riding all night in that roaring rain.

Women are naturally quick. Chessie listened to all that Chief Clancy and outlying sheriffs and posted plantations, even the logging camps, had been reporting in bulletins, and so on. It tickled Chessie, all that fuss over the killing of a popular river cook. They would surely welcome her alive and smiling over the top of a roast wild turkey or a cane rooter barbecued on a fireplace trammel. The Patterns were sighing and smiling, for never had the *Silver Cap Concert Boat* been advertised as it was this night. Henceforward every landing would have a crowd waiting up the bank for them! But I was nervous.

"Honey!" Chessie said. "Don't you reckon *we* better drap out?"

We drap out? Not once in a lifetime that a show boat picks up a cook like Chessie. I had never dreamed of such personal luck myself. Of course, I had eaten at her table and there I was just alongside, I might remark, but as for my having hopes as well as ambitions, I just generally am not what any one would call a blamed fool. I allowed I knew my boundary lines personally and as a business.

A man like me never does have much to pick up around. I even have my bank ties on slip nooses, so all I have to do is give the slack rope a good jerk and she lops all clear down the slope or off the sandbar. Two flips and a gangplank hoist sets me loose of shore entanglements. And the eddy swings us off. 'Course, I hand eases past the *Silver Cap* so as not to bump her. I sneaked out into the main channel and kind of an opportune breezelet in the rain carried us to midstream.

Generally there is a kind of shimmering light playing along the surface of Old Mississip'. This night the rain itself was just a gray quiver, the little drop-splashes dark on the water and smoky drift had dimmed the dark. Never in my life have I seen a gloom like that. Naturally, I never have varnished or enameled boats. That kind look all right if a man wants to make a showing, but I was grateful this night I had a special paint recipe for making a boat duller than its own shadow. Chessie pulled the outside window and port shades covering the glass. She even put a hood over the spotlight reflector. She knew how lights sparkled back off of a dark boat.

I never saw Old Mississip' guarded as it was that night. There were five boats patrolling both ways at Helena, laying a strip of searchlight from bank to bank, and, believe me, that looked like a rainbow wall of exposure for my boat. Being an old time Yankee, I was full found and forehanded. There was a northwest zephyr blowing across the river off the side of Crowley's Ridge. I had a couple of smokepot tubes for emergencies and all I had to do was hold off—my motors all run quiet—and throw a low smudge over about half an acre, six feet high or so. That takes fancy work, but I'm fancy—always had to be to get along in my line. I could stand at my wheel with just my head above that smoke and we went down less than fifty yards astern of

one of those most anxious and energetic patrollers.

Down at Friar's Point they never pay much attention to shantyboaters, anyhow, and even a popular cook does not attract much more than official attention. They had one boat out, but its spotlight was not working very well. And down from there we picked up the Government lights in the bends and crossings—fast and regular.

A friend of mine was justice of peace below Arkansas Old Mouth, to Bolivar. We decided we had better get to see him on account of all these legal aspects of my being delegated, responsible and so on. Judge Sibley Jasper had been listening almost all night on his radio. Then to have me drop in on him with Chessie surprised and miffed him. Chessie persuaded him, explaining the circumstances, and the hair laid down along the back of his neck when he saw how it was Old Mississip's trickery.

He figured on it a spell in his law library, index and codification, the statutes regarding perjury, premeditated and according to oaths, over the telephone, telegraph and with malice aforethought. He did not have any regular precedent for it, but he allowed it would have a relationship to one kind of manslaughter, so he called it involuntary prevarication that I was guilty of. I had meant all right, but was hasty and Old Mississip' had put that laugh on me.

Accordingly, he suggested I had better suspend my line of business, no matter if it was profitable and my customers had kind of a claim of eminent domain over my services, the same as in cases when a water supply can be diverted from its natural course. He, personally, would forgive me my tort, if I had a temporary supply for him. Chessie said I had, and blamed if she didn't unload all my honeydew on to him, assuming the right of eminent domain, Judge Jasper called it, and warned me I had better acquiesce. And he married us, which I had not thought of, but it just seemed as though Chessie thought of everything that night, as well as the next day or two, I being so confused and alarmed.

There was one lucky thing about it. All we had to do was give our natural names, Chessie being out from Marietta on the Ohio, and I had aliased myself on account of respect for my folks back in Massachusetts who were in the past annoyed and disgusted by publicity that had come to me, one time and another.

Come to find out, both Chessie and I had always hankered after quiet and private life. We went off down Chafelli into the Cajun country out around Grande Lake and the thousand bayous.

About all there was to it, the Mississippi lost a good cook and lost me too, which Chessie was kind enough to say was about a fair balance. One other funny thing about it, Chessie and I went over to New Orleans to the horseraces. We went into a restaurant below Canal Street one evening to have a good dinner, when we saw two men talking to each other over a table, and they looked familiar. Chessie caught my arm, stared and burst into a laugh.

They heard her chuckling, rolling their eyes to look, and they just swallowed, confused and nonplused. Their relief and indignation were comical. 'Course, we all sat in together, Chessie plump and cheerful and me all ready for business, if any, but we ate together and we all settled down real friendly and cheerful—the dinner, if not the joke, on me.

There was no need of hard feelings. Old Mississip' had just had another of his jokes, the same as usual, on folks who grow pretty smart.

CARAVAN

By

WILLIAM ASHLEY ANDERSON

THERE'S a special fascination about a caravan of Bactrian camels swinging across the Gobi Desert when the cool days of winter are beginning to shut down. So warm, so self-contained, so strong and independent. The caravans have always seemed to me like separate worlds drifting through space, indifferent to time, unshaken by the storms that occasionally strike them from out the emptiness of the deserts.

Bactrian camels are great handsome fellows, largest of all camels, with a throat and chest covering of brown wool that hangs down to their fetlocks. I've seen them; crowded in the camel inns scrambling, nimble as goats, over one another's backs. Their two humped backs make perfect saddles when in the prime of late autumn—firm and upstanding, warm and snug—perfect seats for riders in *gilghat* boots, sheepskin coats and tightly drawn, quilted foxskin hats.

Camelmen lead them in strings of six—one man on foot to every six camels. A peg is fixed permanently in the nostrils of each camel, a cord connecting it with the preceding camel's tail, except for the leader, who is guided, of course, by the leading camelman. Each camel is equipped with a freight saddle, not unlike a light wooden sawbuck, that can be loosened and lifted off easily and quickly when the camel kneels down.

The camels we used in making up caravans to cross the Gobi, from Kalgan to Urga, or westward toward Lanchowfu near the northern borders of Tibet, were gathered at camel inns in the Kalgan Pass on the edge of the Mongolian Plateau. They were never brought into town until the cargo was weighed, packaged and entered on the bills of lading. This preliminary work was under the inspection of a camel agent or broker.

Since the camel owners themselves are semi-nomads, drifting anywhere across Central Asia with their beasts, we could not, of course, trust valuable cargo to their keeping with any expectation of safe delivery—at Urga, say, six hundred and eighty miles away; or at Lanchowfu about fourteen hundred miles across desert regions. In making up a caravan, therefore, we negotiated entirely with the head of a camel inn who was known to us as a trustworthy man. He took care of all details, producing the camels when needed in good condition, providing us with a chopped guarantee of safe delivery at destination at a fixed date. This guarantee assumed full responsibility up to the full value of the cargo. When a large caravan was to be dispatched, several camel inns would underwrite the shipment and the camel inns sent supercargoes and assistants, sometimes with armed guards, to safeguard the cargo through regions infested with bandits.

The trip to Urga from Kalgan was usually made in thirty days; the trip to Lanchowfu in a little less then eighty days. For each camel we paid anywhere between seven and thirteen taels to Urga.

The rate to Lanchowfu fluctuated around thirteen taels. Caravans for the latter point now make up at the end of the railroad which has been pushed much closer to the Ordos Desert, and the times and rates have been considerably reduced. Of course, political and economic conditions always cause fluctuations in price.

The commission of the camel inn was around fifty per cent. of the freightage; but since camels cost only forty taels, the owners seemed satisfied.

The average load for a camel varied with the season, between two hundred and fifty and four hundred *catties*. We kept a uniform load around three hundred *catties*. All loads had to be carefully balanced, and the shipment of a heavy object, like a large iron stove, presented a problem that usually could be solved only by employing camel carts or slow, ponderous bullock carts.

If you are familiar only with the dromedary, which is a hot climate creature, you will have to revise some of your notions in regard to the great Bactrian camel. The Bactrian camel is a cold weather creature and is at his best when the temperature is well below freezing. His magnificent coat of wool and large reserve of fat insure his complete comfort in extremely cold temperature. I have slept beside them in the open plains of Mongolia when the temperature must have been close to twenty degrees below zero, Fahrenheit. A curious feature of caravan life in bitterly cold weather is that the Chinese succumb to the cold while the Mongol seems to thrive on it. Frequently I've seen Mongols with sheepskin coats open, baring their chests, tripping by on their ponies, while Chinese travelers were huddled on camel back, swathed in sheepskins and furs, almost perishing from cold.

In late spring the Bactrian begins to molt. At this time the camel leader, as he walks along, will rake handfuls of wool from his animal's throat or legs; then with the aid of a round pebble he will spin the fresh wool into yarn, without a break in his stride. When he has gathered enough balls of yarn in his blouse, he will produce a pair of knitting needles and proceed to knit socks, mittens and caps. It is these balls of wool collected at the end of caravan routes that make the bulk of camel's wool that goes into fashionable garments in America.

During the hot months of summer camels graze, and then very little caravan work is carried on. During the summer they are inclined to be soft and weak, while in late spring, at the end of a hard winter, they are frequently in miserable condition, with necks and backs galled, and pads worn down to the raw by cold pebbles and frozen earth. Since camels will not eat with satisfaction except in daylight, much of the marching across the desert is done at night.

Even a full rigged ship running before a quartering wind can not give the same sense of exaltation, of comfortable detachment, of superiority to all the world, that a man feels riding at the head of a caravan across the Gobi, with the cold air as clear and stimulating as fine wine. The planets glow like Chinese lanterns; the great stars sparkle with the colorful flash of diamonds; the sky is blue and vast overhead; the desert on all sides fades into darkness. It becomes almost instinctive to lift your face to the heavens. So different from an African *safari*, when one's instinct is to keep the eyes lowered, studying the trail.

The lead camels are equipped with great wooden tongued bells, eighteen inches long. These bells, taking their rhythm from the long swinging stride of the camel, give forth a muffled *clunk*. A Mongol camelman will sometimes tune up on a simple flute. Here and there a man will burst into a high pitched song. A mournful Chinese will sometimes scrape some violin chords from a *hu-hu* under his cloak. Against a chorus of shuffling camels pads, of snorting ponies, of throaty camel grumblings, this music makes an unforgetable symphony of the Gobi Desert.

A Story of the Jungles of Siam

TUSKS *and* TICALS

By REGINALD CAMPBELL

NAI KHAM, mahout of Poo Noi Pee Bah, was tootling his flute as he rode the elephant through the dusty market-place after their day's work in the swirling waters of the river.

As the great creature shuffled slowly through the maze of naked children, sleepy pariah dogs, gaily appareled women and decaying vegetable matter that dotted the crowded thoroughfare, Nai Kham gave a toot that caused the giant head beneath him to sway in mild, reproachful surprise, for two dark eyes from among the crowd of chattering girls had just caught his, and the owner of these eyes was beloved of Nai Kham above fame, fish curry, gold or even elephants.

At last the road narrowed down to a white ribbon winding in and out between the towering green walls of the jungle. A word to Poo Noi Pee Bah, the animal stopped, and off slid Nai Kham on to the ground. Bending down, he hooked a pair of stout iron hobbles round the powerful forefeet, and the elephant was free to move slowly through the forest and fill his great belly till the eastern sun, peeping over the treetops, should denote the beginning of yet another day's toil in the roaring, teak filled jungle streams.

The mahout straightened himself up and was turning to hasten homeward, when a rustle from within the glooming

scrub caused him to freeze motionless, alert and expectant. The rustle came again, the leaves parted, and Nan Sao walked into view.

Now Nan Sao was a robber. For years had he defied capture by the Siamese police, who had placed a reward of as much as one thousand ticals upon his dusky head; but all in vain, for the inhabitants of the surrounding villages lived in fear and awe of this terrible man, and not for them was it to risk vengeance, swift and sure, by seeking to betray him to the authorities.

Nan Sao spoke, and his words were terse and to the point—

"Nai Kham, I want those tusks," he said briefly, pointing to where Poo Noi Pee Bah was hobbling off into the jungle.

Now Poo Noi Pee Bah, though not of unusual size or stature, possessed the most wonderful pair of tusks, long, shapely and curving delicately outward and upward. Never, in all northern Siam, had such a pair been seen before, and the dacoit knew that they were worth much money. Moreover, he had friends who could profitably dispose of them over the Chinese border.

"Lord," quavered Nai Kham, "I can not do it. If I cut them I shall come into much trouble from the great white master, who knows everything."

The robber's harsh face hardened.

"Thou hast a girl. I have seen her. Thou are betrothed?"

"Yes, Lord."

"If those tusks are not in my hands within seven days from now, that girl dies. Remember: I, Nan Sao, have never broken my word." The speaker noiselessly slipped away and was lost amid the gloaming of the trees.

For a space Nai Kham stood, silent and sorrowful, a black dot on the path that dazzled in the tropical sunshine.

Then a thought struck him and, turning, he followed the trail of the elephant till he came to where it stood, feeding off delicate bamboo shoots and lazily fanning itself with ears, trunk and tail.

Anxiously the mahout glanced up at the huge forehead and a gasp of relief escaped him, for he saw that, in the hollow of the right temple, a tiny spot of oil was beginning to exude from a small hole in the wrinkled, crocodile skin.

Seven more days. Yes, by the end of that time the oil would have trickled down till it was on a level with the eye, when things would happen. He would get even with Nan Sao yet, he reflected, as he walked back along the path to the village, thinking of many problems, not the least of which was how much paddy land one thousand ticals would purchase.

FIVE days later Nai Kham saw that his prophecy was right. The oil had now nearly reached the desired spot, and Poo Noi Pee Bah was becoming restless. By all the rules of the teak company for which Nai Kham labored, the mahout should have reported this fact to the white master, so that the elephant could be isolated and tied with stout chains to a tree as far away as possible from his peers. For when the oil mentioned reaches opposite the level of the eye, it is known that a tusker is on must, and woe betide any one who approaches him while in that fierce and dangerous condition.

Nai Kham, however, remained silent; this was the first lapse from his usual exemplary conduct.

On the sixth day several more lapses occurred, all with surprising rapidity. First, he sought out Nan Sao.

"Lord," he said, looking into the robber's hard eyes, "tonight the tusks will be yours. Meet me at the seventh *mai yang* tree from the village two hours after dark. It is the tree where the wild bees have but lately swarmed."

"So be it," answered Nan Sao. "But remember, if thou shouldst try to betray me, thy bones shall be picked bare by the vultures."

"Lord," replied Nai Kham, "by the honor of my father, I swear that thou shall receive the tusks."

In which the driver kept his word.

The meeting over, he padded back to

the village. By the time he had arrived there it was one o'clock in the afternoon, and the day being Sunday, which the white master had decreed should be a period of rest for both man and elephant, the whole world was asleep. The master was dozing in his bungalow, the native clerks were snoring in their attap roofed shanties, the Indian *durwan* nodded over his gun on the stool outside the office. Nai Kham was the only living being that had not succumbed to the languor of the hour and the day; he, on the contrary, was very much awake.

Like a black ghost he slithered through the white gates of the compound, over the sun drenched lawns where a gorgeously plumed peacock regarded him with beady, supercilious stare, and into the dark cool of the office.

Noiselessly his bare feet glided over the boards till he came to his master's desk. On it stood three bottles of India ink, black stuff he had sometimes seen on the clerks' fingers when they paid him his monthly wages. What it was used for he did not quite know, but it stained things black; that was the point, and the moon would be up tonight. Without the ink the moon would be both a help and a hindrance; with the ink the hindrance would be removed.

A flash of white teeth, an outstretched brown paw, and the bottles were quickly concealed in the top slack of the garments he called his trousers.

Forth he glided again, unnoticed by the slumbering universe, and a minute later found him on the market road again. Leisurely he walked through the glaring dust till he came to a stall where a Chinese sold things of iron. A prod in the stomach of the sleeping owner and there followed much bargaining, which left him poorer in pocket by some ten hard earned ticals, but richer in possessions by the addition of a small hand saw and a real jungle knife.

Laden with these spoils, he pattered through the shimmering heat haze till the jungle loomed around him, when he dived into the thickest part of the forest near where he had left Poo Noi Pee Bah.

Then he set himself to three tasks which are not usually included among the duties of elephant drivers.

First, with his precious knife he cut several strands of creeper that writhed fantastically round the trees above him. With these he tied the hind feet of his charge to the nearest tree trunk. It was risky work, for the animal's little pig eyes were wickedly red and inflamed; but the training of years prevailed and Nai Kham remained unharmed. True, Poo Noi Pee Bah could snap the bonds like straw should be become annoyed, but if left alone and undisturbed he would sense that he was tied and would make no effort to escape.

The first job completed to his satisfaction, with his knife he cut two long pieces of bamboo, which he fashioned cunningly, after first whittling off the green bark that clothed them, so as to disclose the white wood beneath.

Then he opened the bottles of India ink and commenced his third and most dangerous task, a task that had to be done, however, for a sudden move of white might spoil everything and bring his plan to naught. It was late afternoon when he returned to the village to enjoy the brief sleep of the just and tired man.

That night, as the moon slowly rose above the brooding forest and gleamed coldly over the silent trees, Nai Kham approached Nan Sao at the prearranged meeting place.

"Lord," said the former, "I have cut the tusks. See, here is the saw I used. But are not the tusks large and heavy? They are beyond the strength of such as I to carry. If Nan Sao would come to where they are—"

"Hold thy hands above thy head!"

Nai Kham complied.

Followed a thorough and systematic search of his person. No hidden weapons, however, having been found, Nan Sao gave the order to proceed, and the two stole like shadows through the moon dappled darkness of the jungle.

At last Nai Kham stopped.

"See, there are the tusks, Lord," he

said, pointing to where they lay on the ground, glimmering faintly in the ghostly half light.

A cry of mingled greed and triumph burst from the robber's lips as he leaped eagerly forward to inspect the coveted prize. As he did so, the mahout stopped, picked up a large stone and hurled it with all his might over his companion's head into the walling gloom of the forest.

Like lightning Nan Sao whirled on his heel.

"Son of a dog," he thundered, holding up the pieces of bamboo in both his hands, "thou has betrayed me! Tell me first, before I kill thee—where are the real tusks?"

"In you!" shrieked the driver as, maddened by the stone and bursting his bonds asunder, Poo Noi Pee Bah clove the dacoit from back to breast with unseen tusks that were as black as night.

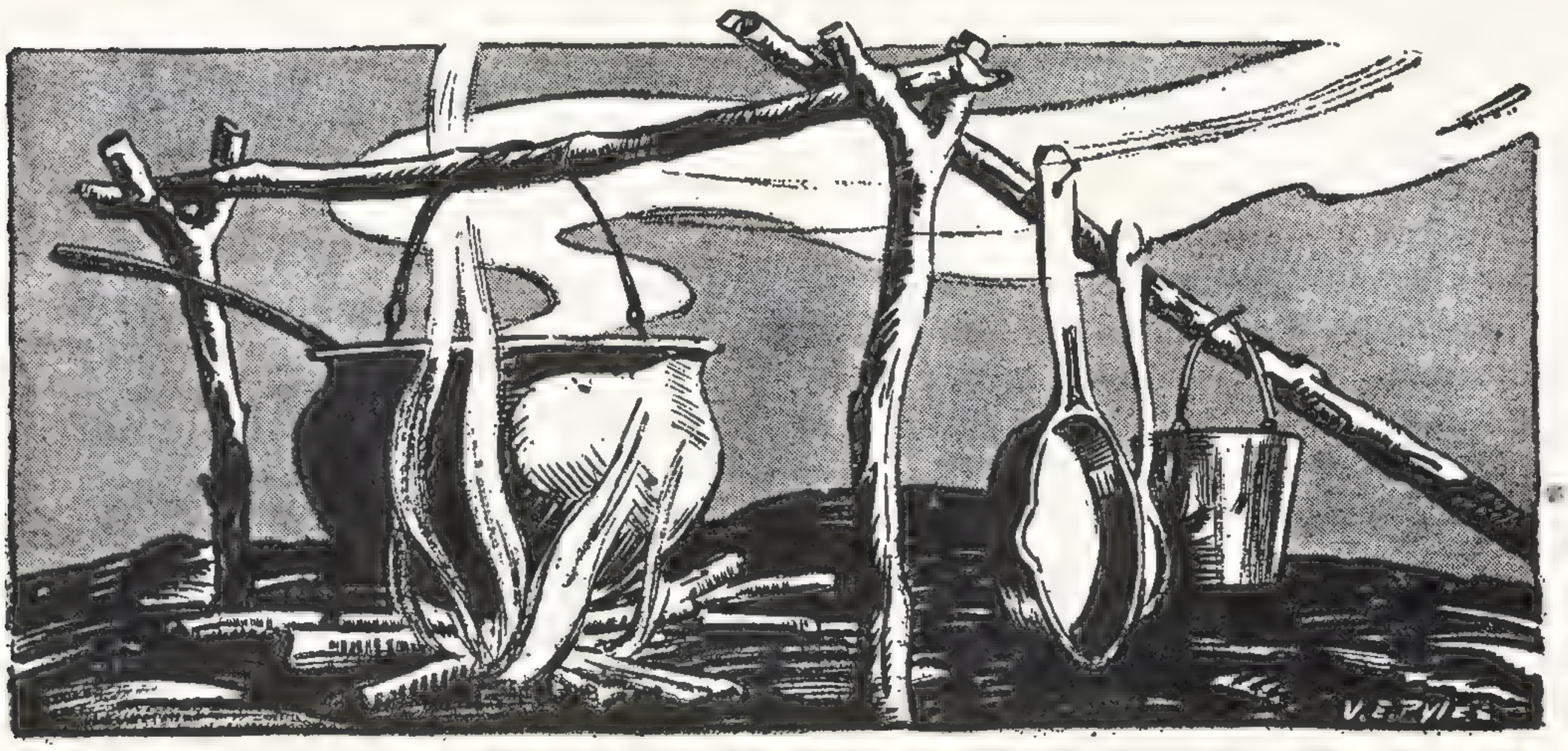
In the fine book of the Siamese Teak Company, Ltd. there appear the following entries against the name of one Nai Kham, driver of Poo Noi Pee Bah:

For not reporting that Poo Noi Pee Bah was in a dangerous state of must, though duly warned by oil.	Fined Ticals	2
For tying the said animal with creepers instead of chains, whereby he broke lose and caused much damage to surrounding property.	" "	1
For stealing three bottles of India ink from the office, with which he stained the animal's tusks black.	" "	1
	Total Ticals	4

But as, after the reward had been paid him, he had his girl and a net profit of ticals nine hundred and ninety-six. Nai Kham was satisfied.

A SOLDIER-OF-FORTUNE'S COOK BOOK

Perhaps even more than a stout heart
he ought to boast an iron stomach



By GENERAL RAFAEL DE NOGALES

IN A LIFETIME devoted to seeing what would happen next, to ranging from the polar icepack to the jungles of South America and from the wastes of Siberia to the teeming cities of Asia Minor, a man pursuing his soul with his sword gathers, and is often compelled to invent, enough strange cooking recipes to delight all the adventurous and not very squeamish palates of the world. I am tempted to put a few of them on paper for the benefit of all and sundry who may find themselves either down and out in remote places or surfeited with the monotonous foods of common civilized life.

The Eskimos consume seal oil in incredible quantities. They boil it and eat it burning hot. This simple culinary operation they also follow in the preparation of whale blubber, into which they sometimes mix pieces of boiled or fried fish. Of course, the Eskimos are also addicted to raw fish, which they eat with skin, tail and eyes, and to raw walrus and raw whale blubber; but that would not come under the head of cooking.

At small wayside stations in Mexico the Indians tempt the passenger with *maguey* worms—worms found on the leaves of the plant from which *pulque*, the national drink, is extracted. *Maguey* worms are either fried or dried in the sun. The worms are considered a great delicacy.

All over the tropical portions of Latin America iguanas—giant lizards—are considered a dish for the discriminating. They taste like chicken, but their meat is more

tender and more savory. Iguanas are usually fried in lard and breaded. Iguana eggs, which are about twice the size of a walnut, are highly prized in the jungle districts. They are boiled like a cereal and garnished with strong chile sauces.

Another dish that is popular in certain parts of the Latin American backwoods is roasted ants. Not every ant, the Indians will tell you, is good for making this confection but only a certain class of large reddish ants which the Indians recognize as edible. They are roasted the same way as popcorn and peanuts in the United States. The taste is sharp and sour. A little difficult to get accustomed to, but once you have developed the knack of liking it you'll want more. Its sour tang is very stimulating to the appetite.

Alligator eggs are a regular article of diet when you are on your own in the Latin American river jungles. They are about the size of a hen's egg and are usually boiled. The white has to be discarded because it remains liquid, but the yolk is not disagreeable at all, tasting somewhat like the yolk of turtle eggs. Both alligator and turtle eggs are also eaten sun dried. The soft skin dries up like parchment, the yolk hardens as in a hard boiled hen's egg and the white turns into a yellowish sort of oil. The taste of both alligator and turtle eggs prepared in this fashion is neither inviting nor repulsive—you can take it or leave it with equal relish. These eggs are carried by the Indians as a staple food during their long canoe trips along the jungle rivers.

A delicious salad is prepared with alligator meat. The middle portion of the tail of a small alligator is boiled. Then the meat, which becomes white, is shredded and kept for several weeks in hermetically sealed earthen pots, seasoned with olive leaves, small onions, red chiles and any equivalent of vinegar. When the pots are opened you are confronted with lobster salad; you eat it and it tastes very much like it. Alligator ragout is sold in the peon cafés of Guatemala and in the marketplace, where I have sampled it. It is prepared with sun dried dwarf alligator meat in the same fashion as any ragout. It is offered for sale in big bales tied with hemp strings.

I once ate a slice from the back of a green snake in the jungles of Santo Domingo. I had thrown it into the campfire by accident, and as a joke I told one of my men to eat it. He answered that he would if I tasted it first; and as no Latin American fighter will respect you unless you can excel him in everything that he does, I had to pick the snake out of the fire nonchalantly and eat a slice of it. It had been in the fire a few minutes and, as I picked it out, it looked like a sausage dripping grease. I was surprised to find the taste was delicious, resembling that of fried eels.

Snakes are in favor with the bushmen of Australia. These people, the most indiscriminating eaters in the world, eat them all, poisonous and non-poisonous, boiled, fried, smoked and raw. Besides snakes they eat frogs, like the French; lizards, like the Latin American Indians; and vermin—like themselves. They do not turn up their noses at carrion and relish the stomachs of slaughtered cattle and sheep. Of course, they also eat one another on special occasions, but whether with vinegar or oil I am unable to say.

In the interior of Africa most tribes eat alligators, skin and bones. They also devour everything within the skin of a buffalo, a rhinoceros or an elephant. During my hunting trips in Portuguese West Africa I have witnessed several banquets of that sort.

Jaguars contribute to the diet as well as to the nightmares of South American Indians. Roasted, the inner parts of jaguars' paws turn out to be excellent substitutes for pigs' knuckles. I have had jaguars' paws often—and I always miss the sauerkraut. The Alaskan Indians prepare the paws of the brown bear in a similar manner.

Monkeys—that is, female monkeys—make very good eating, either roasted or boiled. The male, as with wild pigs, has an offensive musky smell, but the female of the species is less deadly than the male,

in this case at least. Monkey grease is yellow and, although it can be digested, I have usually preferred to employ it in cleaning my rifle. In my revolutionary ventures along the Colombia-Venezuela frontier I have frequently had occasion to eat monkeys, and sometimes I have blessed my stars for a realistic and unimaginative palate, for they were the only food to be procured. For eighteen consecutive days once, during my raid into the Arauca region of Venezuela in 1913, I fed myself and my men on roast monkey flesh without salt. Only two or three times could we vary our diet with wild fowl. As a sidedish we had *caimito*, the tender white section of a variety of palm to be found in the virgin forests of that region. And during my trip across the Nicaraguan jungle two years ago I and my seven men kept alive on monkey flesh without salt, changing the menu now and then with wild pig and *guacaa*, a large red parrot whose meat is tough like that of a duck.

ONE AFTERNOON while I was entertaining a band of wild Goajibo Indians near Tame, Colombia, some of them spotted the carcass of a bull that had been killed that morning. It was already maggoty and foul smelling. The savages pounced on that piece of carrion and with lightning speed cut through the putrid surface until they struck fresh meat. I then discovered that the outer layer of flesh acts for a time as refrigeration for the inner layers. The Chicago packers may discover this truth after a time.

Horse meat is, of course, the classical food of besieged towns and stranded armies. But among the nomad tribes of the interior of Asia colt's meat, not horse, is considered a delicacy.

Camel's meat is also among the luxuries. When Arab tribesmen wish to honor a guest they roast a whole camel colt and serve it on an enormous tin platter surrounded by *pillow*, which resembles rice cooked in butter. The dish is delicious—especially the hump, the inside of which is tender and fleshy. I would walk a mile any day to get one of those camels.

Raw eggs buried until they get green are the Chinese equivalent of Limburger cheese. I have never tried them, so I can not either recommend them or issue warnings against them. But I am very fond of fried frogs' legs, which the Chinese prepare in the same manner as fried shrimps, serving them in steaming grease. I am told that after the legs are torn off the frogs the little beasts are thrown back into the pond to grow new legs. They never do, of course, but new frogs are born every minute, legs and all; and so far as the trusting Chinese know, they are but old frogs bearing new legs.

Swallows' nests are another Oriental delicacy. These are built with a gelatinous substance secreted by the swallows. The nests are glued to the perpendicular walls of tall cliffs. They are carefully washed and boiled until the gelatinous matter dissolves, forming a very palatable bouillon which is in great demand in Paris. It seems to be the fate of Chinese foods to be in demand in all places save China.

Electric eel is among the disagreeable dishes that I have been forced to eat from sheer hunger. I sliced them and fried them in their own fat. They tasted like carbolized cotton dipped in codfish oil. Tapir meat is edible under strenuous circumstances, but it leaves an aftertaste of wagon grease or shoe polish in your mouth. However, if you are in the South American jungle trying to overturn a government and every town and village is bristling with gendarmes on the lookout for you and you find nothing but tapirs, eat their meat by all means; it will not kill you.

The most indigestible nourishment I ever partook of was a piece of dry caribou hide—in Alaska—which had formerly served as a pouch. I boiled it for ten hours until it grew thick as dog biscuit and soft and transparent as jelly. After eating a few mouthfuls of it my stomach protested so vigorously that I was afraid I would die; after awhile I began to be afraid that

I would *not* die. The day after, hunger persisting, I boiled three pairs of moccasins, with similar results.

I used to frequent a little restaurant in Vera Cruz whose specialty was smoked *cason*—roasted shark's meat. I enjoyed my meals there very much, for shark's meat is as soft and delicious as the best flounder.

In Iceland the shark is buried in the sand for several weeks, then taken out and eaten raw. The Icelanders are great drinkers; and rotten shark's meat enables a man to drink a large quantity of liquor without feeling its effects—disagreeable effects, I mean.

Along the Choco coast of Colombia, nearing the Panama frontier, the butcher shops keep several turtles lying flat on their backs outside the door. The customer chooses the cut he wants and the butcher cuts it out. Then he places a stomach shell over the remnants of the turtle to keep the flies out until the next customer arrives.

The Biblical habit of eating locusts and honey is still practised today in the Sahara Desert and in the Arabian Peninsula by quite un-Biblical characters. It is a staple food during some seasons of the year—when the figs ripen and the locusts spread like sandclouds over the oases. The figs, especially the black ones, when exposed to the hot desert sun literally melt into a fluid as sweet as honey. The natives gather the locusts, roast them, grind them and mix the dust with fresh figs, knitting them into the shape of round cakes. The result is delightful. There can be little doubt that the Jewish traders, who were constantly in touch with the nomad tribes of the interior of Arabia and the Syrian desert, knew of the existence of this kind of bread.

Abyssinia was until quite recently the land most inimical to meat sellers. The old-timers used to get their steaks on the hoof. Taking an ox, they cut off the steak, rubbed the wound with curative leaves and turned the animal loose to grow another.

Human meat, I have been told, is among the most savory. Wild beasts, after they have tasted it, can never go back to lesser delicacies. Among human beings in certain parts of Australia and South America cannibalism possibly is economically motivated, men eating their fellows when other game is scarce.

But I have first hand testimony that it is of rare good taste. Not far from the Barranca Bermeja oilfields of Colombia there still are tribes of cannibal Indians. Some years ago I met a Colombian officer who had eaten human meat by mistake while helping himself to the contents of an earthen pot full of Indian stew. The savages, deserting their camp after an attack he had led against them, had left the stew boiling over a fire. He and his men were highly pleased with the food, some of them comparing the meat with that of baby lamb. And then one of them fished a human hand out of the pot! The officer was so horrified that he attempted to shoot himself, only the resolute efforts of his men preventing him from doing so. He told me the story himself at Aguascalientes and everybody in the region corroborated him.

It is the general assumption that a soldier of fortune needs above all else a stout heart. My culinary experiences ought to prove that what he really must have is an iron stomach.

The PRISONER

A Complete Novel of the War Spies

By

ARED WHITE

CHAPTER I

A MYSTERY—AND A MISSION

CAPTAIN FOX ELTON glanced inquiringly at Sergeant Walters as the telephone on his desk buzzed sharply. A telephone call to him at midnight was without precedent at headquarters where only an impending armed drive served to keep the military wheels moving after night. And military activity, even in the counter-espionage section, had been normal of late.

"Is that you, Elton?" inquired a crisp voice.

"Yes, sir," affirmed the young officer. He cast another quick glance at the veteran non-com, who sat up in his chair attentively.

"This is Colonel Rand," said the chief of the counter-espionage section. "I'm glad I caught you. You will wait in your office until I arrive. I am at the general's château—and will be at the *caserne* in twenty minutes."

"Very good, sir," said Elton.

The receiver went back to its hook.

"Colonel Rand himself, Sergeant," said the captain, his brows knitting. "He's coming here immediately and says I'm to wait. I can't imagine what it is brings him

of VINCENNES

at this hour. And from the general's château, too."

Walters whistled and searched his mind for a solution.

"Maybe the general's crowding him for the answer to them Boche ciphers," he suggested.

Elton shook his head.

"It could hardly be that. I told the colonel this afternoon I'd have the key ready for him tonight—and he said not to bother him, he'd get it tomorrow."

"Maybe they got some new information on that mystery chap, sir," Walters argued. "The Cap'n'll admit that Koenigergratzerstrasse is throwing a lot of fits over that one lone Boche lieutenant in a French jail?"

"I'll agree that the Germans are wrought up over the prisoner," Elton assented. "But I can't see that these intercepted ciphers are going to solve that mystery—now that I'm at the bottom of them."

"Maybe he's their pet spy, sir—a baron or count or something; another bird like that Baron Von Strindheim, and they can't afford to lose no more of their good ones."

"He's got us all puzzled, Walters. Lieutenant Baron Von Falkenheyn is the name he's carried under—but the French find no such Prussian listed in their secret records. One of their operatives trapped him trying to organize some kind of a party for the Kaiser's benefit when he reaches Paris."

"Sure working up a dead hope there, sir." The old sergeant grinned. "Them Dutch is cheerful thinkers if they figure on landing Kaiser Bill in Paris."

"Figure on it!" exclaimed Elton. "They're certain of it. Of all the conceit I've ever heard it's contained in a memo the French found on Von Falkenheyn. It's secret, of course, but it's so funny I want you to have one good laugh after your dumb evening waiting for a case that hasn't developed."

"I sure was hoping there'd be something moving for us when you got to the bottom of them ciphers from Belfort, sir," rejoined Walters sadly.

"Listen to this." Elton chuckled. "The French gave us a copy in case it would help us with the ciphers."

He took from his pocket a sheet of flimsy upon which had been typewritten in French by the French Second Section at Paris a penciled memorandum. The Prussian agent Von Falkenheyn had carried it when he was picked up at his rendezvous in an elegant château at Levallois-Perret in the environs of Paris.

"It directs that a survey be made of the Elysée where his Imperial Majesty is to make his home," Elton interpreted. "That means, of course, when his army has first made Paris safe for the Hohenzollerns. Next, the Comédie Française is to be visited as to its suitability for the production of Sudermann's 'Heimath', which is to be presented in Wilhelm's honor. Ah, but here is the height of Prussian optimism. His Majesty is finally to visit the Invalides where the great Napoleon sleeps. There he will take Napoleon's sword and announce to his generals, '*Ceci est à moi!*' which means 'This is mine'."

"You don't mean Bill's out to rob the dead, Cap'n?" broke in Walters. "That listens to me like the ravings of a lunatic."

"In this particular part of the mad scheme there's a reason for it," said Elton. "The Prussians only figure on settling an ancient grudge. Napoleon did that same thing when he had the Germans under his military heels—took the sword of Frederick the Great with just those words."

"They're a queer lot, sir, these European big guns," mused Walters. His eyes sparkled again in a moment. "But anyhow, I'm thinking Napoleon's sword's safe enough from Kaiser Bill. There's too many good American soldiers want three-day pass in Paris to ever let the Dutch take it now!"

"True enough," said Elton. "But the Prussian Oberst-Generals will squander another million German soldiers before they get that simple fact through their thick skulls. And the first to die will be Von Falkenheyn—who dropped down to Paris as the Kaiser's advance agent and fell into a French prison as quickly as if he had worn a sign advertising his presence. Another sure casualty is the runner our M. P. lads picked up leaving Belfort with this wad of cipher. If they keep on they'll have a lot of squareheads to keep poor Von Falkenheyn company when he goes to the firing squad."

"It's sure a waste of good lives, trying to pry a captured Boche loose from that French mill at Vincennes, sir."

"That's the puzzling part of it, Walters—that they throw good lives after bad in this case. They're simply frantic about it—couldn't be much more stirred up if we had Hindenburg himself in our hands. You may read for yourself their latest move."

Elton handed his field assistant a sheet of flimsy which had been taken from a German agent disguised as a Swiss merchant at Belfort. It was the usual forbidding jumble of letters:

KRLZO RPHFG XCBRF NRVFX FVZHL MYKTY ROIMH
GTPRD TCCTH FGKXF ZLDHK RTGFR RULIX KRFHR
GGHKM YVZHD DXFUP HRECOZB

"Sure, sir, it'll always be Greek to me," Walters complained, glowering impotently at the puzzle. "Them Boche secret messages is safe from me."

"This one might have been safe from my prying, too," said Elton, "if I hadn't suspected a key word—and I simply guessed it by trying every word that might fit in with their anxiety to free Von Falkenheyn. The word 'urgent' clicked, after a few hours letter juggling. You may see the key for yourself."

He handed Walters another sheet of paper bearing two lines of block letters, one set under the other. In the second line, the line of symbol letters, appeared the word "urgent". Walters took it and pored over the key:

A B C D E F G H I J K L M N O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z
X Y Z *U R G E N T* A B C D F H I J K L M O P Q S V W

"All you have to do with that key is refer each letter in the message proper to the second line—the key line. Then look just above it to the top line for the true letter. Write them down one at a time,

and you have it. But I'll spare you the trouble. Here's a third sheet with the solution all written down for Colonel Rand."

KRLZO RPHFG XCBRF NRVFX FVZHLM
RESCU EVONF ALKEN HEYNA NYCOST

YKTYR OIMHG TPRDT CCTHF GKXFZL
BRIBE UPTOF IVEMI LLION FRANCS

DHKRT GFRRU RULIX KRFHR GGHKM
MOREI FNEED EDSPA RENOE FFORT

YVZHD DXFUP HRECOZB
BYCOM MANDV ONGLUCK

Walters read slowly:

"Rescue Von Falkenheyn any cost. Bribe up to five million francs. More if needed. Spare no effort. By command. Von Gluck."

He looked up, his gray-green eyes glistening with a suddenly revived hope.

"Sir, that reads like a flock of Boche might be buzzing around Vincennes!"

"Very likely," said Elton, with a doleful shake of his head. "But I'm sorry there's no way of figuring out where it's any affair of ours."

"Not, sir, when we got wind of a flock of Boche spies going to try to rescue some strange prize like this lad Von Falkenheyn?" The old non-com's face and voice brimmed with injury.

"But you forget how sensitive the French are, Walters," said Elton. "And this is plainly their case. They arrested Von Falkenheyn—they've got him in their own jail—and they know that Wilhelmstrasse would trade a battalion for the rascal, whoever and whatever he is. So our function seems to end with breaking down this cipher, which is all the French asked us to do for them. Now, of course, if the colonel gets the French to invite—"

THE ABRUPT footsteps of Colonel Rand interrupted. The counter-espionage chief threw open the door without knocking and walked briskly up to Elton's desk.

"I wish to speak to you, Captain Elton, on a matter of profound importance—and alone," he ordered.

Elton placed a chair for his senior officer as Walters faded from the room. Colonel Rand accepted the seat and lighted a cigar with studied deliberation. But Elton saw that the colonel's long, thin face, never given to the reflection of gay moods, was set in grim, taut lines, his whole manner that of a man who faces some grave necessity.

"Sir, I have that cipher message reduced for the French," Elton volunteered cheerfully. "We find that the Germans are using a million francs as bait to—"

"Captain Elton," Rand broke in, ignoring his star assistant's report, "there is a very grave situation which I am going to place squarely before you."

"Very good, sir," Elton said easily.

He sat looking at the colonel with untroubled eyes, screening his growing wonderment at the colonel's strange visit and stranger mood as a full minute of heavy silence ticked by. But the colonel would unfold his purpose in due time, he thought—and in the meantime it was not his own habit to accept the easy contagion of another's humor.

"The general is vitally interested in this," Colonel Rand went on presently. "You'll understand this when I tell you he wired me from Paris to meet him at his château the instant he arrived here—and I've been in conference with him for two hours past."

Elton held his tongue. He wondered why the colonel did not speak at once whatever was on his mind without attempting to impress him further with the seriousness of it all. Then suddenly Rand leaned across the table toward him and spoke in a sharp, incisive burst of words.

"Elton, some one has got to go into Germany—without delay!" he said.

Whatever may have been his thoughts, Elton responded with a mild smile.

"Pardon me, sir," he said, taking his leather cigaret case from his pocket, "but does the Colonel object if I light a cigaret?"

"And that some one, Captain Elton," Rand added quickly, "is going to be you, sir—unless you specifically object to the mission!"

"I know of no reason, sir, why I should object," said Elton as unconcernedly as if he had been accepting an assignment to Paris. He lighted the cigaret without again soliciting his senior's indulgence. "But just what are the details of the junket, sir?"

"I will not accept that as your decision," said Rand. "You have a right to know exactly what you're up against before you make up your mind."

"That's very considerate, sir. Thank you."

"The facts are these. The Germans are massing men and materials for a terrific smash. Paris, now or never, seems to be the motive power that is driving them. The Allied generalissimo himself must know whether this is a last desperate play —whether German national morale is breaking, is close to the breaking point. Only a trained observer can estimate that information, and simple as it may sound, Elton, history will be molded by the answer to that question. Can't you see that it may shape the whole Allied campaign in the war crisis now hot upon us?"

"I can see it very plainly, sir," said Elton, his clear, level gray eyes fixed upon the colonel in polite interest without any of the strained intensity in which a man of lesser control might have accepted the information.

"Now then, the obstacles, Elton," Rand continued with a deepening solemnity, almost in a voice of warning. "Marshal Foch already has sent his best men across —through Holland—through Belgium—through the lines, direct, even dropping them from airplanes. Resourceful operatives who have been across before. And every one of them has been detected—promptly! The present crisis seems to have endowed the German secret service with a devilish sort of intuition. The last of the French operatives, a veteran who went in by way of Sweden, was stood against a wall at Köln last week."

"So the job comes to us, then, sir, as a sort of last resort—an afterthought, so to speak?"

"They do not ask us to try, Captain. The general merely suggested that we might have a man—and while he didn't tell the French who, I know he was thinking of you when he spoke. You know, he was very much impressed by your work in trapping Von Strindheim; and your work at Belfort; and your last Paris case. He even suggested tonight, Elton, when we were estimating the Germans, that you have a sort of—of uncanny intuition of your own."

"I suppose," said Elton, a mildly cynical smile in his eyes, "that I'd ruin my professional standing altogether if I didn't accept the assignment after all those fine compliments."

"No, the general said particularly not to influence you in any way—for you to make your own decision. He reasoned that you are the only one who can estimate your chances, and it would be a foolish risk to sacrifice our best cipher expert on a blind chance."

"Any particular plan I'm supposed to follow in getting across, if I decide to go?"

"No, we discussed that. The general said, again, that the best plan would be to leave all that entirely to your own judgment."

Colonel Rand glanced at his watch and arose.

"It is nearly one o'clock, Elton. Sleep on it, and let me know in the morning." He started for the door, then turned back. "Better still, unless you refer to the subject by ten o'clock tomorrow morning, I'll dismiss it from my mind so far as you are concerned. That will save you any embarrassment."

"Thank you, sir," said Elton, "but to save the Colonel any further uneasiness, I can give you the answer now. I accept the detail."

"But, Elton—" Colonel Rand was back at the young officer's desk, looking at him with an anxious intensity—"a few hours to think it over, a night's sleep; it isn't a thing to decide without careful thought, without weighing out your plan. Give me your answer in the morning."

"I've thought it over carefully," said Elton. "I've even hit upon my plan—

since we've been talking here, sir. The importance of the mission fully justifies any risk. A night's sleep would only strengthen my decision, and I'd rather put in that time working out the details of my plan."

The counter-espionage colonel stood looking at his assistant for several moments in silence. Then, in an unprecedented lapse of his military dignity, he thrust his hand impulsively across the table to Elton's shoulder and left the room without speaking.

CHAPTER II

THE FUGITIVE

THE RIPPLING silver of first call for reveille in the headquarters *caserne* aroused Elton from a shadowy world of maps and notes in which he had spent the night while others slept. In his mind he had traversed the long, hard trail into Germany and back, meeting and overcoming the endless danger and difficulty that loomed up out of every turn of his impending journey.

As he leaned back from his desk, now heavily littered by large, colored terrain maps and voluminous penciled notes, a smile of satisfaction beamed from his eyes. His plan was sound. Or, if it was not, then he was content to pay the price of his own fallibility. It was a plan that fortified him against the keenest intuition of the German secret service. A week should put him into Germany, and perhaps two weeks might see him back at headquarters again with precious information for the Allied high command. Or, if his time calculations went awry, a month would be the limit of his requirements—unless he did not return at all. He had thought, too, of that, only to purse his lips in a cynical expression of indifference. In this great game of war in which nations were in the mold, what was one man's life?

After locking his maps and memoranda in his desk, Elton sauntered through the tranquil headquarters village to the Hôtel de France. The warm sun of late June was mounting the housetops, its luxuriance greeted by the fervid melody of myriad chirping sparrows. A small army of uniformed clerks, chauffeurs, couriers and orderlies was pouring through the narrow streets toward the *caserne* to take up the dull, unending routine of the Army's brain center. From their faces and manner, they might have been so many peaceful toilers, going to office or factory for the daily task. Nor was there anything about the tree bowered French village to proclaim that here was sheltered a factory whose product was battle, whose clicking typewriters and buzzing telegraph keys controlled the moods and movements of that far flung barrier of flesh and blood that lay embattled beyond the green hills to the north and east.

Elton put aside all thoughts of his mission as he ate his breakfast at the village café, and found surcease in complete repose. In that mood he returned to the *caserne* to test his plan finally with a fresh mind, before launching it into the world of grim reality. Not a simple plan, such as a direct invasion by airplane or a passage of the lines in German uniform under cover of darkness. Not even his fluent use of German and his knowledge of German customs tempted him to try that. It would leave him too vulnerable to German war thoroughness, to German secret service intuition, whose efficiency the French generalissimo had paid such solemn tribute.

His approach must be given the elements of probability. It must be one that would stand the test of shrewdly suspicious and coldly analytical Prussian minds. He must reach his goal gradually, logically and without apparent design on his own part. Circumstances growing out of his past operations favored such a plan. Unless, as was always possible, something went very much astray at the very outset. And once his initial plan succeeded, he would have to improvise his course, depend upon his own resources for what was to follow.

At eight o'clock he destroyed his notes

by fire, folded a set of neatly forged passports into his leather pocketbook and reported to Colonel Rand for final instructions. He found his superior engaged with a heavy morning mail that had arrived by courier during the night. Colonel Rand again forgot his austerity at sight of Elton and got to his feet.

"Well—?" he inquired almost breathlessly, his eyes searching Elton.

"I find there are several details to be worked out," said Elton in a matter of fact way. "I will need your help on them, sir."

The colonel sat down with a show of relief.

"You haven't changed your mind then—after thinking it over?"

"Sir, that was decided last night. I've spent the time since then perfecting my plans."

"Have you reduced your ideas to—to memorandum form, for proper study by the staff section?"

A glint of amusement shone in Elton's eyes.

"I understood, sir, that the details would be left to me," he said with polite firmness. "It was with that understanding that I accepted the detail."

"I—I remember," said Rand, biting his lip at what savored of impudence from a junior. "It shall be that way if you wish. Please remember, my only thought is to help you—and certainly the case is important enough to take every chance against a wrong move."

"Thank you, sir. But you'll agree that I am the one who would find a wrong move the most unpleasant," Elton rejoined. "And now I have several requests to make of the Colonel."

"You can count on us to go the limit, Elton. Tell me what you want."

"First, sir, I wish to have a small Army car—one of those black lizzies—sent today to Bourges. Have it parked early tomorrow morning in front of the French *caserne* there—the one we are taking over for a central records office. After it disappears tomorrow morning have a trusted operative report its loss to the French with the information that he saw some one drive it off on the road, Bourges-Vierzon. The operative will make as much fuss as possible over the theft, and proceed into Paris by train to search for it there."

"An odd request, Elton. I hardly see your purpose, but that will be easy to arrange."

"Second, I would like to have delivered to me here a small can of black paint and a brush. A minor matter, but important, and I do not wish to procure it for myself at a French store. At the same time I would like to have an old suit of civilian clothes, including a large, roomy gray duster. Finally, I would like to have something like ten thousand francs, all in notes of large denomination."

"Rather a large requisition, Elton, unless you intend to try bribing some of—"

"I hadn't that in mind, sir," Elton broke in tartly. "Of course, if the sum is too large, I'll get along without it."

"By no means. Twice that if you say you need it. There's no question of expense involved in a case of this importance."

"Thank you. Finally, in looking over the confidential file of our officers of German birth, I find the name of Lieutenant Steuben, Quartermaster Corps, on duty with the Service of Supply. I would like to have him put under close arrest immediately and held incommunicado for investigation."

Colonel Rand's brows met.

"What reason have you to suspect Steuben?" he inquired bruskly.

"None," said Elton. "I have made a study of the whole file of our German-born officers, and I think Steuben can be trusted to the limit. He was merely born in Germany—went as a boy to America with his parents, who were dissatisfied with conditions at Brandebourg where the family had lived for several generations."

"But I understood you to ask for his arrest, Captain. I don't follow your reasoning."

"It's a plain injustice, sir, which I regret very much. But war makes some hard necessities, as the Colonel knows,

and this is one of them. We can make full amends and explanations to Lieutenant Steuben later. But right now—and until I have completed my mission—his arrest is very necessary."

"Very well. I'll issue the necessary orders. What next?"

"That is all, sir."

"When—just when—are you planning to leave, Elton?"

"Sometime before midnight."

"And am I to know your destination, or is that your own secret, too?"

"No secret, sir." Elton smiled enigmatically. "My destination when I leave headquarters is—Germany, sir."

FROM the eight o'clock Chaumont-Tours express, Elton cast a parting look back at headquarters as the train chugged across the high stone viaduct at the edge of the village and plunged him into the first leg of his perilous mission. He saw the receding *caserne* now as something more than a group of dismal French barracks. A goal, a symbol of his hopes. Often he had thought of it as something hideous, had dreamed of that happy day when, the war ended, it would be shut from his view forever. Now its reappearance would mark the greatest achievement of his life, he thought, the end of a trail along which peril would join him on the morrow aud stalk close at his elbow until the headquarters rose again, like a Mecca.

In addition to the inevitable musette bag with his immediate personal effects, he carried with him a small canvas courier bag, which bulged with his outfit of civilian clothing, a small can of black paint, his Army automatic pistol and several extra ammunition clips. It required all of his will power to remain awake through the long night. The wide benches of the second class compartment were an almost irresistible invitation to sleep. But sleep would efface the haggard lines and dark rings that encircled his eyes. And he had his own good reason for preserving his jaded appearance.

When, at daybreak, the train pulled into the gate at Bourges, he got out, hired a horse cab and drove at once to the *caserne* at the edge of the village where he found the black Army lizzie parked in front of it. Dismissing the cab, he slipped the gray duster over his uniform, put on a French cap, threw his effects into the auto and drove off, turning out of Bourges on the highway. A kilometer on his way he stopped, removed the gray duster, pinned an M. P. brassard around his left arm, painted out two of the numbers that identified the sides and rear of the car and headed back through Bourges, taking the artery Bourges-Nevers-Doleville in the direction of Besançon, on the frontier.

At nine o'clock he stopped in the village of Cercy-la-Tour and ate barely enough to put down the seething revolt of his stomach. At Saincaize, and through the unending succession of French villages he passed—Autun—Allerly—Doleville—François—the natives stared with open mouthed interest at the spectacle of an American officer in a part of France so remote from the American sectors. But Elton found no uneasiness on their account. Even if the village gendarmes at Bourges flashed their alarm to the east they would describe in precise detail a small black American Army automobile marked plainly with a number in five white figures and driven by a civilian in gray linen duster. A small black Army automobile marked only in three figures and driven by an American M. P. officer would reach far over the imagination of the French local authorities. Or, if they should chance to question him, he need only point to the mystic M. P. brassard with the logical explanation that he, too, sought the wily culprit who had stolen a small black automobile from in front of the *caserne* at Bourges.

Besançon rose before him in midafternoon. He paused at the picturesque old frontier village long enough to walk about the ancient streets and make certain that his presence had been widely noted. With another sop to the aching void of his empty insides, he left Besançon and drove

on into the green garbed foothills of the Franches. At a secluded point in the narrow, winding road he stopped to paint the remaining numbers from his car, pull the civilian clothes on over his uniform and toss the musette bag into the tonneau. Then he set his face toward the first critical move—the passing of the French-Swiss barrier at Morteau, the portal of Switzerland.

The Swiss officials accepted his passports without quibble. They were willing to take him as exactly what he professed to be, a Swiss National returning to his home in the interior following a prolonged absence abroad. But the French, who stood vigil along the length of their frontier against spy and spy runner, were more cautious, their senses sharpened by the war. Despite Elton's plausible manner, his flawless passports and the boldness of his insistence that he be passed, French caution shaped into sharp suspicion.

"I shall be forced to make a formal protest if I am delayed here," said Elton stoutly as the parley lengthened into an hour. "My passports entitle me to some consideration."

"But yes, monsieur. It is so." The bearded French lieutenant was very polite. "But I must ask your indulgence, monsieur, while we investigate further."

"You mean that I am to be detained here—regardless of the laws of ordinary courtesy?" Elton demanded warmly.

"Monsieur, I am in deep regret." The lieutenant bowed again. "I am compelled that you be detained until the morrow."

Elton quickly read that the French officer was adamant. The five wound stripes on the faded French uniform did not encourage the thought that the officer might be bluffed into a change of heart now that he had taken a stand. Nor did his polite certainty indicate a man who might be talked out of whatever suspicion gnawed at him.

Instead of arguing further, Elton raised his shoulders in a French shrug of acceptance. He knew that the Frenchman had sensed the falsity of his claim. Perhaps had sensed the false passports, the intangible thing that betrayed him as something other than what he seemed to be. He smiled at the other's misguided instinct. If he could only explain his true mission—that it was for France he must pass! He smiled cynically at the thought. His mission halted—perhaps ruined—by a man who had accepted five wounds in the very cause for which Elton sought now to cross that forbidden barrier.

His mind sought swiftly for some way out. Detention meant investigation. Investigation meant that his forged passports would be disclosed. And he remembered with a start that an examination of his *carte d'identité*, of his personal effects, would give circumstance enough to convict him before a hurried French military tribunal unless he unmasked his real name and purpose.

"At Belfort is my friend Monsieur le Commandant Boismorand of the French Army," said Elton, naming an officer of the French Second Section. "For years we have been friends; I can have him to vouch for me."

"You are the friend of the Commandant Boismorand?" the French officer asked, visibly impressed by the claim.

"We visit often together at Belfort," Elton replied quickly. "He said to call upon him if at any time he could be of service. I will go at once and see what can be done."

While the French officer pondered upon this proposal, Elton put the plan into action. Taking advantage of the officer's indecision, he turned the car and drove back down the hillside on the road to Besançon—to accept the one grim alternative.

CHAPTER III

THE WAY TO BASEL

TEN KILOMETERS from Morteau Elton turned into a narrow side road that led to a French vineyard, abandoned his car, stripped the civilian clothes from over his uniform and hid in a thicket of scrub oak until dusk, while he charted his next move by map and

compass. At nightfall he set off afoot to the east. Unless misfortune threw him into the clutches of a French patrol, he should be safely in Switzerland by midnight—and on a Swiss highway leading toward Basel by sunrise.

In the sweltering hours that followed Elton found bitter cause to curse the misguided French suspicion that had forced him to run the frontier. Rise, gully and tangled underbrush challenged his endurance. Only by means of his compass was he able to cling to an easterly course across the border wilderness, fighting his way step by step through brushy draws and over rocky ridges.

Midnight found him spent at the top of a ridge to which he had climbed in the hope that it was the summit of the range. But ahead lay the mocking black shadows of endless higher ridges. When he gathered a fresh reserve of strength he chose an easier course to the south and east. A course that might bring the menace of a border patrol. But he was unwilling to gamble his remaining strength in a further assault of the ridges.

By three o'clock he was moving ahead only a few yards at a time. A fear was growing that his strength might fail to see him through. He remembered with a groan that it would soon be daylight. Daylight would force him into hiding against inevitable French patrols—and another day of fasting might leave him little strength to renew the struggle.

He was staggering on again when a beacon winked at him out of the night. A yellow splotch straight ahead. His famished body responded with a surge of strength, an impulse to run toward the place. But at thought of his mission he sat down and studied the possibilities circumspectly.

He tried to estimate the distance he had covered through the frontier wilderness. There was no way of telling. He knew that if he had crossed the line he was safe from patrols. Switzerland was a paradise of deserters. Terror stricken poltroons from all the armies came and went among the Swiss cities, eking out a precarious existence. The Swiss might have interned them, but chose to ignore them.

Elton approached cautiously while he waited for daybreak. Then, if he saw that it was a patrol station, he could turn back into hiding until night and fight it out to the frontier in another direction. But daylight disclosed a small Swiss cabin through the door of which he saw a lone man in civilian clothes, preparing breakfast.

If there was anything disconcerting in the spectacle of a bedraggled American officer at his door, the man who answered Elton's knock gave no outward show of it. A fat, phlegmatic rustic stood looking at Elton the while he puffed stolidly at a long curved pipe. If he evinced any emotion it was a sort of aloof contempt.

"Pardon, monsieur, but am I in Switzerland?" Elton broke the inhospitable silence, addressing the mountaineer in French.

"*Oui*," grunted the other. Another period of unsympathetic staring, then he added, "So you are another who does not like the looks of the war, monsieur? But why do you present yourself here?"

"For breakfast," exclaimed Elton exultantly. "And then I have a matter of business to discuss with you, monsieur."

As he said this he took from his pocket a note of one-hundred francs and handed it to the fellow. The Swiss mountaineer's eyes lighted up greedily at sight of such a sum. His boorish manner effaced itself. He took the proffered banknote and turned it over and over in his hands.

"This is for me, monsieur?" he asked, respectfully incredulous.

"Of course," said Elton. He gave an indifferent toss of his hand. "It is nothing. There is much more for you—if we can come to terms upon a very simple matter."

"My poor *chalet* is open to you," said the Swiss, with a deferential rubbing of calloused hands. "What is it, monsieur, that I can do in your good service?"

"Have you horses, my friend?" Elton inquired.

"But yes, monsieur. Excellent horses stand in my stable—the best horses to the west of Aarberg."

"Good. Then cook some breakfast at once before I pass out of starvation."

Half an hour later Elton was bouncing down a tortuous mountain road in a rickety cart behind a ponderous, slow gaited plow horse. A full stomach, a pleasant prospect again, yesterday's dire experiences a thing of memory. The impending defeat of his mission was now turned to a glorious victory, he told himself. Except for a slight delay in reaching Basel, circumstances had really turned things in his favor.

That hard trail behind should stand him in good stead now that he was safely in Switzerland. His abandoned car would of a certainty be reported to the French and Swiss border officials, along with his discarded civilian clothes; and there would remain the record that he had been turned back by the French at Morteau. The Swiss mountaineer would not shortly forget the early morning visit. German thoroughness could be depended upon to uncover these circumstances anon—and they would stand Elton in good stead, he argued.

At the village of St. Imier he left the horse cart for a wheezy little automobile whose services he was able to acquire by paying twice its value. It heaved and spluttered its way to the north and east, up and down among the undulating hills, threatening to pound itself to pieces at every kilometer. But it clung faithfully together. By noon it was under the shadow of Mt. Terrible where Elton paused for luncheon in the village of Delemon. Three hours later found him chugging into Basel on the Strasse Oberwiller. His plan was now running according to schedule once more. He drove direct to the pretentious Drei Koenige on the Rhine, stalked across the elegant lounge and presented himself for registration.

"*Was wollen sie?*" stammered the staring functionary whose job it was to receive and place guests of the hostelry.

"*Nicht verstan* Dutch," responded Elton. "Do you speak English or French here?"

"As you wish, monsieur," condescended the attendant. "You wish lodgings?"

"Do not people usually want lodgings when they present themselves at a hotel?" Elton demanded. "Show me your best suite—a quiet one overlooking the river."

"For a single night, monsieur, or perhaps for longer?"

"I may be here a month or I may be here a year," Elton replied crisply. He looked about at the staring faces in the lounge, the very natural stir caused by an Allied officer in full uniform on neutral territory. "It will depend," he added stiffly, "upon how far I am annoyed at this place. Please remember that I wish quiet; I wish to be left alone."

"Yes, monsieur."

Elton took from his ample purse a note of one-hundred francs and tossed it indifferently to the fellow.

"I suppose," he grumbled, "that since I carry no baggage I must pay in advance for my lodgings."

"Yes, monsieur. For our very best accommodation, twenty francs for the one night, or if you—"

"Did I ask you the price?" Elton interrupted. He rejected the proffered handful of notes tendered him in change. "Keep it yourself," he said. "Now, if you will direct me to some place where I can get some decent clothes. . ."

"Monsieur wishes the *tailleur militaire*, perhaps, who can make him a new uniform, then?"

"Uniform!" Elton sneered the word. "I'm through with uniforms, my friend. What I want is some decent civvies. And after that I want to be left alone—alone, do you understand?"

CHAPTER IV

VON FALKENHEYN

BASEL lay astride the swift, greenish upper Rhine, its motley array of steep multi-colored slate roofs basking in the warm June sun, smug in its security from the mad ravages that raged just beyond its portals. A few meters and

you were in Upper Alsace, or in Baden. Half an hour by motor to the north was Mulhausen. Thirty miles landed you under the guns of Belfort. Some twenty miles to the west the Allied right flank and the Teuton left flank were deadlocked in grim embrace. The distant roar of cannon came with the breezes at times. But cannoneers took care that no long range shell dropped upon Basel, no intrepid *avion* dropped explosive near its sacred portals. Swiss territory was immune, thanks to the barrier of the Swiss defensive army and the even greater barrier of the Swiss mountain ranges behind Basel.

But underneath its serenity seethed war intrigue. It was another Mecca of the weak of heart from the embattled armies; a sanctuary where the poltroon might find surcease from his battle ague. German, French, Portuguese, English, American deserters walked the streets in faded, ragged uniforms, despising themselves for their weakness, yet clinging tight to this haven where violence did not jar their jellied livers.

It was a haven, too, for the *espion*. Secret agents of many nations went about here. Espionage, counter-espionage, spy watching for spy. For the German army it was a vital center, a portal from France. Through Basel came spy couriers from Lucerne and Berne, carrying secret dispatches from Paris routed to Wilhelmstrasse or Koenigergratzerstrasse. Dispatches in cipher, in code, in invisible inks, secreted in shoe heels, in the stays of corsets, on the inner wrappers of cigars and cigarets, in pencils, pens, hollow teeth. Secret combat reports from Belfort slipped past the weak vigil of the fighting flanks above the Swiss frontier, or were tossed over in dummy grenades where the fighting lines ran close together in the Vosges of Lower Alsace.

Upon all this activity the Swiss winked an indolent eye at Basel. Their neutrality did not demand a relentless spy hunt, so long as the interests of Switzerland were not involved. Spies were well stocked with funds. They made business for the hotels and shops. So long as they remained under cover and had passports, so long as they were caught in no grave violence within the Swiss boundaries, it was not for the Swiss authorities to pry too far beneath the surface.

Elton had counted upon a quick response to his presence. No matter what the Swiss mountaineer might have thought of him, he knew that the shrewd eyes of Prussian secret agents would not mistake him for a cowardly deserter from his post of duty. There was nothing in his makeup to suggest the weakling, even though he had come to Basel jaded, bedraggled, an apparent deserter. There was a set to his fine gray eyes, a depth of jaw to his boyish face, a timbre in his mellow voice, that could not be effaced by subterfuge. The trained *espion*, adept at reading men by the infallible token of eyes and voice, would not be mistaken in his mettle. But how were they to estimate the brain behind the man in the desperate game of wits at which they played?

The swiftness with which the German secret service forced contact surpassed Elton's every expectation. He had thought that they would keep him under quiet observation for a few days. His insistence at the hotel that he wished to meet no one was calculated to whet their appetites, give them a point to weigh when they came to a final estimate of him for their own purposes. But no sooner had he entered a clothing shop, a short walk from the Drei Koenige, than he was followed in by two men who eyed him covertly while pretending to interest themselves in a minor purchase.

"Pardon, you are a stranger here—an American officer?"

The man who addressed him, in very good English, was an undersized young man who spoke in a precise, cautious voice.

"I was—an American officer!" replied Elton with a sneering emphasis. He turned away bruskly to his shopping.

"Perhaps we can be of service to you, my good friend, if you are a stranger here," the man persisted. He made a wry

grimace. "We, too, had our own good reason for coming here, my friend. If we had not come we might have been forced into uniform; but we find it more to our liking to be in Basel, where we can call our souls our own."

"Thank you," said Elton. He bowed coolly. "I hope you will pardon me, but at present, messieurs, I am hardly in a state of mind to deserve friends."

The other laughed good humoredly.

"We can understand, my friend," he said. "May I present myself? I am Herr Imsbach, lately of Kaiserslautern. This is my good friend, Herr Eggiwil, who is from Bergzabern. Ha! We are from Germany—Germans; you from America, an American. Our foolish brothers fly at the throats of one another. We meet in peace, good fellows got together!"

Elton bowed stiffly, ignoring the proffered hands of Herr Imsbach and Herr Eggiwil.

"Erich Paul Steuben." He announced the name under which he had registered at the Drei Koenige. He added with a touch of bitterness, "Steuben, lately of Brandebourg, more lately, I might add, Lieutenant Steuben, Quartermaster Corps, United States Army. At present, just Erich Steuben of Basel, Switzerland."

"Ah, you had trouble then with the American Army, my friend?" said Herr Imsbach.

"You will pardon me, will you not?" Elton inquired frigidly.

"Your pardon, my good friend," said Herr Imsbach with a deep bow.

Imsbach left the store at once, followed closely by his friend Herr Eggiwil. Elton observed them closely as they crossed the street. A smile played on his face. A precious pair of rascals, and cast in an absurd rôle. Imsbach with his broad bulging forehead, his little black eyes set very close together against a long, stubby nose, thick pouty lips in which there was no blood. Eggiwil's crafty, cold eyes, sharp inquisitive nose and mirthless smile. Such men presenting themselves as convivial derelicts, obliging, simple hearted fugitives from German conscription. If their appearance had left any doubt in Elton's mind, it was removed as they marched away. They walked with the stiff precision of a pair of grenadiers crossing a parade grounds. Only long service, hard service, the mental attitude of the uniformed ranks, fixed such a gait upon men. The best actor could not simulate it. Neither might he escape it once body and mind had been cast in the mold.

THE GERMAN secret service, whether moved by some mysterious urgency or by a mere desire to classify the new arrival as promptly as possible, was equally precipitate in making its second move. For the time being the brace whom Elton's reserve had repelled, effaced themselves. The follow-up was made almost as soon as Elton had seated himself for dinner on the balcony overlooking the Rhine at the Drei Koenige. A woman was selected for this maneuver, an exceptionally attractive young woman with nothing of the breezy camaraderie of the courtesan-spy type in her approach or manner. She paused at Elton's table.

"You are an American, monsieur—an American officer in deep trouble," she said in excellent English. Her voice was low and sympathetic, a detached, impersonal sort of sympathy for a soldier in distress.

"You are very kind," said Elton, rising to bow his acknowledgment of her attention. "May I present myself—Steuben, an American as you have guessed. But why do you conclude that I am an American in distress?"

"I saw you, monsieur, when you came to the hotel," she explained. "You were very unhappy. But I hope you will be able to forget—here in Basel. I am Mademoiselle Thiezac."

"I am honored, mademoiselle," responded Elton. "I am, as you suggest, in no high spirit. Are you dining alone—or do I dare hope—"

He indicated the empty chair at his table. Mlle. Thiezac hesitated a moment, then accepted.

"War destroys the conventions, is it not so, monsieur?" she inquired with a reserved smile. "But if my presence will give you cheer—is it not my duty to accept?"

Mlle. Thiezac was a new type of female operative, Elton saw. One who used the subtler weapon of personal sympathy rather than the power of personal charm which her exceptional beauty placed at her command. Although she was vivacious as they dined, it was a reserved, well bred gaiety, an animation in which there was no hint of coquetry. She preserved with fidelity, throughout the evening, the rôle in which she had presented herself, a woman whose quick sympathies had been arrested by war time distress.

Elton quickly dropped his reserve under a drastic conclusion. Since the German secret service saw fit to press him, he would hold off no longer. There was a distinct plausibility in pouring out his troubles to a beautiful and sympathetic young woman. As the evening wore on, he told her the story of Lieutenant Steuben, falsely accused of embezzlement of Government funds.

"So, knowing the trick of the Military Police brassard, I came here, mademoiselle," he concluded. "There was nothing else to do."

His final words stirred her suddenly out of the mere sympathetic interest in which she had drawn his tragedy from him. She sat staring at him intently.

"But it seems almost impossible, monsieur, that you could escape across the whole breadth of France!" She said this breathlessly.

Elton was puzzled by the evident agitation his words had stirred. Why, of all that he had told her, did this simple exploit move her so strangely?

"But, mademoiselle—" he smiled easily —"an officer with an American M. P. brassard can go anywhere. It is the symbol of military law, and Americans have not learned to question it."

"You will pardon me, monsieur?"

Mlle. Thiézac arose almost before he had finished speaking, impatience to leave stamped on her face. She extended her hand and rejected his polite offer to see her to her home.

"My poor aunt will be distracted," she exclaimed. "I have just realized that I am very late. *Bonne nuit, monsieur.*"

Elton's breath was taken away by the swiftness of the next German move. He was on the verge of retiring for sorely needed sleep half an hour later when there was a light rap on the door of his suite. He opened it upon Herr Eggiwil. Close behind stood Herr Imsbach. They bowed gravely and stepped across the threshold without invitation.

"Pardon, my good friend," said Herr Imsbach, "but we have a matter of the most serious importance to discuss with you."

"I am very tired," said Elton icily. "I know of no business that will not wait until the morrow."

"My friend, you will never regret your hospitality, or the few moments of your time we shall consume," said Herr Imsbach. He closed the door in his insistence. "We have asked that the finest wine be brought, and cigars."

"If you insist," said Elton grudgingly. "Be seated, gentlemen. You will pardon me if I ask that you be brief, since I have been through a great deal in the past few days and am in need of rest and quiet."

THE TWO sat down, Imsbach twisting uneasily in his chair, Eggiwil bolt upright and stolid, his cold gray eyes fixed upon Elton in a calculating stare. They were no sooner seated than there was a second rap at the door. Imsbach responded to the knock with an apology and admitted a flunkey bearing an iced bottle of rare Rhine wine. Imsbach dismissed the waiter and opened the bottle ceremoniously with his own hands, pouring three brimming glasses.

"Before we speak, my good friend," he announced, "permit us that we drink to your very good health."

With the toast, Herr Imsbach withdrew into a somber silence while Herr

Eggiwil put aside his empty glass with such abruptness as to shatter its stem. He moved forward to the edge of his chair.

"And now, *mein Freund*," said Herr Eggiwil in a brusk, incisive voice, speaking English brokenly, "let's talk vot we got on our minds, like real gentlemen. Is it dot you, Friend Steuben, is persecuted by der Amerikan Army—because you iss German born, *ja?*"

Elton looked at the fellow with a bristling resentment.

"That, it seems to me, is rather a personal question, Herr Eggiwil," he said curtly.

"Und dat you iss falsely accused of stealing der moneys of der Amerikan Army?" the German went on in the same tone, ignoring Elton's resentment.

"Did you come here to impose upon my hospitality, to insult me in my own apartment?" Elton demanded, rising to glare from one to the other.

"Ve come here to help you, Herr Steuben," said Herr Eggiwil. "Ve knows vot happens in France."

With a show of guarded hesitation, Elton resumed his seat in silence and exchanged looks with the unperturbed Eggiwil. Since the fellow was so bluntly insistent upon forcing his decision, Elton decided to avoid the issue no longer. It all seemed so blunt, so clumsily handled, that he wondered if some deft trap lay under the surface of their apparent haste. But further evasion, he concluded, would serve no good purpose.

"Well, what have you to say to me, then?" he asked.

"Revenge!" blurted Herr Eggiwil, his cold face sinking into a repellent leer. "Revenge it is ve came bringing for you, und a fine revenge it is ve offers, Herr Steuben."

"How do I know who you are?" Elton retorted. "How do I know you are not of the Swiss secret police—or even of the American Second Section, or French? Why should I talk to you of my personal thoughts?"

Herr Eggiwil gave a rasping laugh, the mirthless laugh of a man who is without sense of humor, who laughs only in derision.

"Den off comes der masks, *mein Freund*," he exclaimed. "We are of der German Army—der German secret police!"

In the few moments that he sat staring with open mouth at Herr Eggiwil, Elton gradually relaxed from the alert hostility in which he had been observing his guests. He scrutinized with a show of eager interest the credentials which the German held before him, credentials whose authenticity was attested by the Imperial seal.

"Well, what is it, then?" he asked, his manner now more receptive.

"You haf der great opportunity for revenge," said Eggiwil. "Der great opportunity for usefulnesses—der great chances for fortune, for everything any men could make dreams of, Herr Steuben. You haf goot information, *ja?*"

"It is quite possible, Herr Eggiwil," said Elton with an insinuating smile, "that an American officer would know a great deal—not only of what is going on but what is planned."

"You vill join mit us den und vork for der Vaderland, Herr Steuben?"

Elton pondered upon this for some moments while he weighed a thought that had shaped itself out of this wholly unexpected turn of events. He decided upon a bold, direct move, one that, should it succeed, would put him on the immediate highway of his mission.

"I will tell what I know—only to a trained officer of the Imperial German staff, or to the proper officer at Wilhelmstrasse," he announced decisively. "It does not suit my purpose to tell what I know to the secret police, on neutral territory. My information is—is too important for that."

"Goot!" exclaimed Herr Eggiwil. "Goot! Goot, Herr Steuben. Den ve vill gif to you der oath. Der hand in der air, *mein Freund!*"

With German military decisiveness, Herr Eggiwil read to Elton the German oath. Herr Imsbach stepped forward at

the conclusion with a bright, keen lancet and a new pen, both of which he held briefly under the flame of a match to sterilize them. He handed them, after this, to Herr Eggiwil, who forced back Elton's cuff, gave a quick stab of the lancet in the American's wrist and dipped the pen in the tiny rivulet of blood.

There was a glint of amusement in Elton's eyes as he signed the oath in red from his own veins. Grotesque as were the habits of German espionage, he had thought the reports of such medieval rites as these mere fabrication. But his dominant emotion at the moment was not of amusement. His pulse was hammering joyously. This barbaric incident, the evening's unbelievable developments, could only mean that fortune was haunting the long hard trail of his mission at last. Perhaps in a day or two he would be at Köln or even in Wilhelmstrasse. Thereafter, when he had garnered the information for which he gambled with death, it would remain only to make his escape back across the lines. Probably less of a problem, less of a risk, than the feat of getting into war time Germany, he assured himself.

But a moment later his hopes were dashed to the ground even more swiftly than they had been built up.

"You haf boast, *mein Freund*," said Herr Eggiwil, "dot you travels about in France mit der uniform of a police und nobody tinks vot is wrong. Iss it?"

"Otherwise I should hardly be here," smiled Elton before he sensed a certain uncomfortable significance in the other's words.

"Dos iss goot," grinned Herr Eggiwil. "*Sehr* goot, *mein Freund*. Already yet tonight ve put you across *nach* Altkirch in time dot you get der mornings express from Belfort for Paris."

"What do you mean?" gasped Elton. "I said that I would talk only to the staff or to Wilhelmstrasse—yet you speak of Paris!"

"Ach, dot can vait," said Eggiwil. "Sometings is it of der grosser importance. Ve send you, Herr Steuben, to der French prison at Vincennes, vare is held an officier of der Prussian Guard—Leutnant Baron Von Falkenheyn. If you rescue him from der French, Herr Steuben, ach Gott—all Prussia is grateful, *mein Freund*—und you haf der great revenge all at vunce!"

CHAPTER V

A GAP IN THE LINES

IT WAS no new experience to Elton to have cruel circumstance intervene at some crucial moment. His was a realm where circumstance must be circumvented rather than shaped. And above all things, ultimate success meant patient persistence, a grim tenacity that was blind to the grinning specters of defeat, that was oblivious to the haunting presence of eternal danger. A hundred gifts the operative must have who hoped to pry into the guarded secrets of nations at war. Not the least of these are decision, the power of swift adjustment, the logical acceptance of unexpected barriers. He must not only read the thoughts in men's minds, he must guard against disclosing the thoughts of his own mind, the reactions of his nerves, the operation of his emotions. A wrong decision, an unguarded display of emotion, an erronous estimate of an intricate situation—any one of these may invite the icy touch of death.

Elton remembered to mask in a stoical smile the poignant disappointment that rankled behind the mask of his face at Herr Eggiwil's words. He saw Wilhelmstrasse slipping into the distance again, a shadowy thing of the uncertain future, hedged in now by new barriers with which he had had no time to reckon. Great events might be affected by the developments of the past minute. And the Allied generalissimo must wait for vital information while his secret emissary retraced his steps to try his hand at releasing a favored Prussian—the mysterious Leutnant Baron Von Falkenheyn.

"I regret that I have no uniform," Elton spoke up when he could trust his voice.

"You see, when I bought other clothes, I tossed it aside at the shop on Munster Platz."

He had no thought that this circumstance would provide more than perhaps a day's delay, but he was unprepared for Herr Eggiwil's response. Another mirthless laugh, a snap of the hand at Imsbach. The latter strode from the room and returned in a moment with a neat package. He unwrapped it and laid out on the bed Elton's abandoned uniform, neatly cleaned carefully patched and pressed.

"Ve tink you need him," said Eggiwil, with a chuckle of self-felicitation. "Der Germans haf eyes ahead. But now der time is heavy—in ten minutes ve must leaf, Herr Steuben, for Altkirch. Come—Herr Imsbach, he vill carry der uniform. On der route can ve haf much time to talk!"

So this was the reason behind the unwonted haste in which the German secret service had pressed him? The incident of the rescued uniform made that clear enough. And who was this Baron Von Falkenheyn, that his rescue had the right of way over important intelligence reports? The intercepted ciphers already had identified Von Falkenheyn as some one of vast importance or high favor in Berlin. And the desperation of the present maneuver only confirmed the fact that there was no length to which the possible rescue of the mysterious prisoner would not be carried.

A high powered car, of German manufacture, awaited the three as they left the Drei Koenige. They drove off at an unhurried speed to the south and west, away from their real destination, circled the Rathaus, crossed on the ancient iron bridge at the upper end of the city of Klein-Basel, turned to the north at an increasing gait, circled back into Grosser-Basel at the Johanniter Rhine bridge and whirred out of the city on the Belfort route.

It was necessary for Herr Eggiwil merely to grunt his identity in order to pass the Swiss frontier detachment. The German patrol, a few hundred meters farther along, snapped their Mausers into a formal salute at sound of his voice. The car turned west by north at high speed, the driver switching off his lights as a precaution against predatory Allied *avions* and the sharp eyes of long range artillerymen. But the heavy darkness did not affect the speed of the car, its driver proceeding with an instinct that must have been born of unending journeys over this course—probably a regular spy trail, Elton concluded.

Herr Eggiwil gave Elton the lay of the situation, the German plan for effecting the Von Falkenheyn release, in a detail that did credit to German secret service audacity and thoroughness. The fellow spoke in a sharp, quick, staccato voice, irritating in its monotonous rasp, his words coming in short jerky sentences, as disagreeably colorless and as forbidding as the sputtering of a *mitrailleuse*.

And as the German spoke, Elton quickly learned that he was not being sent on a blind trail. Desperate as the plan might sound, it was rational, possible of execution, one in which the German secret service fitted Elton's rôle as an American officer cunningly to their purpose. He was to appear at the office of the French commandant as an American M. P. officer sent to question Von Falkenheyn, present his formal orders from the American high commander, indorsed by the French G. Q. G, and ask that the final approval be indorsed by the French prison commander at Vincennes. His forged American orders would be so pieced together that when the French prison commander attached his signature, he would really indorse a second order commanding the immediate surrender of Von Falkenheyn's custody to the representative of the American Army. This, in turn, would be presented to the keeper of the prison.

"See, *mein Freund*, der papers iss ready," exclaimed Herr Eggiwil.

He snapped a halt order to the chauffeur, took a set of neatly folded official documents from a leather pouch and handed them to Elton under the light of a flash lantern.

German engravers had reproduced exactly the official letterhead of the American headquarters, Germany forgery had attached exact facsimiles of the proper signatures. Had he not known the papers were forgeries, Elton vowed that he might have been willing to identify them as authentic. Even the terse, bristling verbiage of the American high command had been imitated with a convincing finesse.

They passed through Altkirch, an array of ghostly black shadows that lay within light artillery range of the French-German south battle flank, left the car a few hundred meters farther west where the railroad tracks through Upper Alsace now lay in disuse, and proceeded on foot. Herr Eggiwil continued his instructions, reducing his voice to a whisper. He plied Elton with suggestions and warnings, baited him with promises of the rewards of success. At the last moment, as they brought up against the outer network of German communicating trenches, he added his parting information.

"Remember, *mein Freund*," he whispered, "if it's you need help, der Café Côté d'Or at six hours of der P. M. Ask vot you vish—if it is Amerikan soldiers, if it is gold, if it is automobiles, no matter—ask vot you vish. Our agents—he will get it. Und—" the rasp of Herr Eggiwil's words became that of a file against steel—"if it is gold, a million francs is nothings. *Mein* agent will bring it, in goot cash. Herr Steuben—*auf wiedersehen*."

The German was turning away, leaving him alone. Herr Imsbach had left them several minutes before, disappearing to the front. The penetration of the French lines, even in front of this quiet, lightly held sector, was a dangerous undertaking. A chance patrol, collision with a strand of wire . . . Elton had good cause to know the traps that lurked in the black inferno of No Man's Land.

"But the passing through," he said to Herr Eggiwil. "Am I to flounder my own way across? You have given me no instructions."

The German forgot caution in his mirthless laugh, a metallic sort of gurgle that seemed to recur each time he thought of German superiority.

"It iss nothings," he said. "Nothings, *mein Freund*. Herr Imsbach vill take you to our vire—a French officer vill meet you at two hours o'clock—und by time of light, he vill haf you in Belfort."

"A French officer?" Elton repeated incredulously.

"*Ja, mein Freund*. A French *Leutnant* vot command der outpost. Himmel, Herr Steuben—und a robber he iss. For haf vot ve pays, a goot man vould sell his soul to der devil. But der rascal knows our necessity, and for a hole in der mud he charges more as iss worth der whole of Alsace."

BELFORT was steeped in the heavy darkness that precedes the dawn when Elton was whirred into town in a French sidecar operated by a traitor in Allied uniform who had piloted him through the lines, speaking only in answer to the sharp challenge of French sentinels. Evidently the guide's treacherous contract provided for nothing further than a safe delivery inside the city. He stopped his motorcycle in a black street, motioned Elton out with a jerk of his wrist and flashed back in the direction of his betrayed outpost.

It was a matter of no concern to Elton that he was left to grope his way about as best he might. Belfort was familiar territory to him and, though he was not able to identify his precise location, he knew it would be a simple matter to find the station. An hour would see dawn, three hours the departure of the Paris Express via Vesoul—Dijon—Melun. He knew he did not dare trust himself to sleep, even should he arouse a hotel keeper. After the exhausting experiences of the past three days there would be no ready awakening once he yielded to the clutches of exhaustion.

He walked slowly along the stone sidewalk, plotting his future course. So swiftly had events moved to change his whole plan of reaching interior Germany that

there had been no time for more than a vague sensing of the trail before him. He found it difficult to think clearly. His body ached from fatigue, his mind was half numbed and it was only by the assertion of an iron will that he was able to keep his thoughts moving coherently.

But he was unable to fight down a growing bitterness, an oppresive feeling of failure. Had he been what Herr Eggiwil thought him to be, his course would be easy compared with the difficulty before him. For he did not dare risk the rescue of Lieutenant Baron Von Falkenheyn. Such a coup, even if successful, would lead to grave complication with the hypersensitive French command. And it was equally certain that, should he return to Switzerland empty handed, he would receive small consideration from the German secret service. If they were not openly resentful, or suspicious of his failure, at least they would waste no further valuable time on him. And there was no doubt in his mind that his every movement would be observed once he left the Paris Express at the Gare de Lyon at Paris.

Then, out of the shadows of doubt, a ray of light flashed into his jaded brain. He stopped under the impact of the thought, and wondered that he had not thought of it before. What was Von Falkenheyn's life, no matter who he might be, weighed against the information Elton sought in Germany? Why, then, would it not be an easy matter to arrange officially for Von Falkenheyn's secret escape? Would it not give him certain entrée to reappear at Basel with Von Falkenheyn? Pave the certain way into Germany?

His face brightened as he thought out the possibilities. He saw that it would require careful planning, painstaking execution, the utmost secrecy. But there was ample time for those details between now and his arrival at Paris.

One difficulty confronted him as he boarded the Paris Express at seven o'clock—the probability, even certainty, that he was already under observation. German thoroughness would place a skilfully disguised operative on the train. From that vigil he must contrive to escape, since he was helpless to proceed with his plan without first enlisting the aid of the counter-espionage chieftain at headquarters. It was Colonel Rand who must negotiate with the French for Von Falkenheyn's escape. And to be seen at either American or French headquarters would be fatal to Elton's hopes at the very outset.

By the time the Express drew in at Vesoul, he had completed his scheme of eluding the German vigil. Not an agreeable plan, he thought, but one that offered no alternative since he did not dare risk the French telephone or telegraph in this spy infested region. Then, too, he must contrive to leave no aftermath of suspicion for his action in disappearing from the train south and east of Paris.

Since Vesoul did not offer him the opportunity he sought, he remained aboard until the Express stopped at Dijon. Dijon, being an important American billeting center, was certain to serve his purposes, he thought; a conclusion that confirmed itself the moment he left his compartment to find his opportunity waiting for him right at the station. An M. P. officer at the station meant an M. P. automobile with driver waiting outside the station.

"Report immediately in the station to your commanding officer!" Elton commanded the M. P. driver.

The well disciplined chauffeur responded with alacrity. Elton climbed into the empty seat, threw the clutch in gear and sped off on the main route, Dijon —Langres—Chaumont. Reaching the north exit of Dijon, he turned sharply to the left into the secondary route, Tallant—Chatillon—Bricon—Chaumont. It would be only a matter of minutes until an infuriated M. P. detachment would be in hot pursuit. But they would logically conclude that the fugitive was a reckless A. W. O. L. from the great American school center at Langres fifty miles due north. In the meantime, if a puzzled German operative left the train at Dijon to

investigate the loss of his shadow, he was certain to find the furor behind Elton very much in earnest.

Two hours of dizzy racing on a twisting narrow road landed him unmolested at the headquarters *caserne*. While his pursuers had missed his trail, he knew that they would not stop at Langres—and that both routes converged at Chaumont. But he smiled as he sailed through the big iron gate at headquarters. The supreme high command post would be the last place any one would go in search of a stolen automobile. And the machine had not yet served the purpose for which he had taken it.

Colonel Rand, surrounded by a solemn conference of high ranking staff officers, was bent over a table map, expounding upon a complicated network of multicolored pins, when Elton entered. The colonel dropped the conference in midsentence.

"You—Elton!" he exclaimed. "Why, I thought that by this time you were in—"

"May I speak to the Colonel privately? A matter of urgent importance, sir."

Elton cut his senior off purposely before he could pronounce the word that would betray the mission to the assembled officers.

The colonel hesitated, then escorted him into a vacant office across the stone corridor. Without waiting for questions, Elton laid the situation before his chief. Colonel Rand accepted the plan without waste of time or words. He reached for a desk telephone.

"I'll have the French liaison officer here immediately," he said decisively. "We'll get quick action on this!"

"May I ask that you do not?" Elton put in, half reaching for the colonel's wrist to restrain him.

"I don't understand; isn't that exactly what you wanted?"

"A liaison officer would mean a shuffling around of the proposition from one French bureau to another, sir, until the whole French staff knew about it."

"Well, what of it? Haven't they a right to know what's going on?"

"But a secret isn't a secret when half a dozen people know of it, sir. And I have had an uncomfortable feeling that the Boche has a line of his own into the French secret service."

Colonel Rand glared astonishment at the statement.

"What reason have you?" he demanded.

"Let's discuss that another time, sir—when I return from Germany. Every minute counts with me right now, since I've got to be located under cover in Paris before the Belfort-Paris Express arrives at the Gare de Lyon."

"What is it you want me to do, then?"

"Go direct to French G. Q. G, sir, deal direct with the chief of staff, and see to it that there are as few people as possible on the inside. The chief of staff and the commandant at Vincennes ought to be enough to know. Then report conditions to me at the D'Orsay in Paris where I'll be registered as Lieutenant Stout—that's as good a name as any. Also have Sergeant Walters report at the same time; I may have need of him."

"I think you're unduly apprehensive over the French secret service, Elton. But since you're the one that has to go into Germany, I'll do as you wish in the matter. I'll leave at once for Paris by auto."

"Thank you, sir." Elton smiled. "I'm leaving for Paris—even sooner than that."

CHAPTER VI

THE RENDEZVOUS AT PARIS

HALF a dozen times on the long, furious grind down the route—Chaumont—Troyes—Provins—Paris—Elton woke up at the wheel of his roaring car barely in time to escape disaster. It was four o'clock when he left headquarters. He traveled now in a large military sedan, the normal property of a staff general. But the staff general had made the mistake of leaving it standing driverless in the *caserne*. He would find a disreputable, dust covered smaller car in place of his sedan—and probably would hear from

the M. P. service if he drove the substituted car through the village.

The hour lacked several minutes of eight o'clock when Elton completed his record run from Chaumont to the French capital. He abandoned the staff general's car at the curb on the Place de la Concorde in the very shadow of French secret police headquarters, took a taxicab and sped to the Pont Royal. Thence he walked across the Seine to the Hôtel Grand Palais d'Orsay, engaged a room under the name of Stout and dropped fully dressed on his bed, asleep.

The next moment, as it seemed, he was engaged in a desperate struggle with Herr Eggiwil and a squad of German grenadiers who were trying to force a hemp rope about his neck. Herr Eggiwil suddenly vanished in thin air and Elton found himself blinking up from the bed at Colonel Rand. The colonel continued to shake him vigorously until Elton's mind fully returned to the world of reality and he leaped to his feet.

"My God, Elton, you gave me a scare!" fumed the colonel. "I've been shaking you like mad for five minutes. I thought you must have been poisoned."

"I'm all right now, sir," blinked Elton, "but I guess my poor carcass didn't relish being dragged from this bed quite so soon. I haven't spent a lot of time lying down of late."

"Well, the way it looks now, Elton," said Colonel Rand dolefully, "you'll be able to catch a lot of rest. I ran into a snag at French G. Q. G."

"They didn't refuse!" Elton gasped. "You don't mean to say they refuse us Von Falkenheyn's custody! Why, what is one man compared with—"

"There's the rub, Elton. The French say Von Falkenheyn isn't his name. They've worked up a suspicion that he is none other than the Count Wolfgang Von Kastellaun—the most dreaded spy in the Kaiser's service."

"Von Kastellaun—of the red cipher," said Elton with a touch of awe in his voice. He added impatiently, "But even that slippery rascal with all his red pranks isn't as important as the information I'm supposed to bring out of Germany—or is he?"

Colonel Rand shook his head.

"But remember the French are moved a lot by sentiment, and while French G. Q. G. is willing enough to part with Von Falkenheyn, they're afraid it would demoralize the whole French Second Section and secret police—and probably raise cain in the French Chamber of Deputies, not to mention the newspapers, which would probably charge graft."

"Sir—" Elton turned his hole card—"would French G. Q. G. raise a rumpus about Von Falkenheyn's escape if—if they could escape responsibility, if they could show it was beyond their control?"

"I think not, Elton. They admitted the logic of our arguments, but were afraid to be a party to it. And there's no way, without letting the commandant at Vincennes in on the deal, which means that he'd talk to save his own face if there was a public rumpus."

Elton sat down, smiled thoughtfully and lit a cigaret.

"That's good enough," he said quietly. "I'm willing to accept the responsibility of getting Von Falkenheyn out."

"But if you fail, or if it's brought home to the Americans, can't you see the scandal?"

"I'll stand the gaff of all that, myself, without involving any one if I fail, sir."

Colonel Rand raised a protesting hand.

"It's not fair to let you add that risk, in an official matter, Elton," he cried. "I'll drop the matter before I'll let you do that."

"Nor is it fair," responded Elton without lifting his voice, "to leave unturned any stone that may help end this war. I'll have Von Falkenheyn on his way back to Switzerland inside of two days."

"Do you fully appreciate what you are stepping into—that we may be forced to disown you if you fail at the prison?"

"Sir—" Elton smiled— "will the Colonel please have Sergeant Walters report to me here in the morning. Not too early, sir, as I'll have so little to do tomorrow that I want to sleep late."

AT SIX O'CLOCK of the next evening, Elton went nonchalantly into the Café Côté d'Or on the Rue Vaugirard in the shadow of the Gare Montparnasse. He seated himself indolently at a vacant table and pretended to be absorbed in a Paris daily newspaper. Presently he turned the paper over, shook it out and laid it across the table, at the same time shifting in his seat, stroking his hair abstractedly with his left hand seven times and flicking the lobe of his right ear with his left middle finger.

Since nothing happened, he repeated these commonplace gestures, taking care to follow the exact sequence given him by Herr Eggiwil. The waiter interrupted him.

"Monsieur perhaps would care for his dinner in private—where he will not be annoyed by the music of gargling soup?"

"I'll be comfortable enough here," said Elton with annoyance. "I'll give you my order presently."

"But monsieur will be more comfortable above—"

As the fellow talked, Elton caught the sign of the German secret service in Paris from his fingers.

"Thank you, *garçon*," he responded. "I really believe you are right."

He followed the man through the café, up a flight of stairs and down a long, dimly lighted corridor to an isolated private dining room. The waiter opened the door, bowed Elton inside and left.

At a table in the center of the large, finely appointed dining chamber sat a woman, seemingly engrossed in a book. She looked up as Elton crossed the room, and smiled.

"Mademoiselle Thiezac," said Elton, suppressing his amazement and speaking as easily as if he had met her by appointment. "This is a very great pleasure."

"You were hardly expecting to find me here," she said, extending a hand which trembled. "I only hope you will not think of me too severely for having deceived you at Basel, monsieur."

"The necessities of service excuse indirection, mademoiselle," Elton replied gallantly. "Are not even the strategies of the armies, the tactics of battle, based on deceiving the enemy? And of course you did not know at Basel but that I was the—the enemy."

"You are very gracious, monsieur. But I hope you will not mistake me for an ordinary—spy." She shuddered at her own word. "It is only because we have so much at stake that I have come to Paris. When I am frightened it is only the thought of how much this means to me that sustains me."

"You mean, mademoiselle, the Baron Von—"

He broke off and looked about the room cautiously.

"Have no fear of being overheard, monsieur," she reassured him. "I have it from the Herr Eggiwil himself that many years ago the Côté d'Or was acquired for the very purpose it now serves us."

"The Lieutenant Baron Von Falkenheyn," said Elton, "must mean a great deal to you, Mademoiselle Thiezac, that you take such risk in his behalf."

"The risk is nothing, if we only succeed in saving him, monsieur!" she said earnestly.

"A brother perhaps, or a sweetheart, perhaps a husband?"

Mlle. Thiezac's eyes flashed a look of shocked astonishment.

"Oh, no, *monsieur, jamais!*" she objected quickly. "You—you do not understand. It is—is nothing to me, and yet it is everything. But only as a matter of—of duty. That may sound strange to you, but I can't explain. Not now, monsieur."

"You have learned how much time we have—the date set for his execution?"

She smiled a wan gratitude for the change of subject.

"There has been no date fixed by the military court, monsieur. They have sentenced him to be shot, but for some strange reason they do not take him from Vincennes."

"Perhaps they intend first to establish his real identity, mademoiselle; is that not probable?"

"We have thought that, monsieur. But if so, they waste their time."

"Even in my few hours in Paris, mademoiselle, I have heard it said that the French are now certain that it is the Hauptmann Count Von Kastellaun they hold a prisoner."

As he said this, Elton observed closely the response of her features. But her face gave no answer.

"The Hauptmann Count Wolfgang Von Kastellaun would be a great feather in the cap of French conceit," she said placidly. "But come, you are keeping me in an agony of suspense—to know your plans—your hope of success."

"Tomorrow," said Elton gravely, "will give us the answer."

She half arose in the emotion stirred by Elton's words, then sank back in her chair, her face gripped by mingled hope and fear.

"You are going to try, then, tomorrow, monsieur?"

"Tomorrow, yes. If fortune smiles on us, by this time tomorrow the Lieutenant Baron Von Falkenheyn and I will be well on our way to the Franco-Swiss border."

Mlle. Thiezac sat blinking rapidly upon this picture as if wondering if she dared hope that it would come true.

"Is there anything, monsieur, we can do to—to help you?" she asked breathlessly.

"Yes, mademoiselle. I am counting upon your help. At eleven o'clock in the morning you will have four of your men in American uniform—a sergeant, a corporal and two privates—all with the American Military Police brassards."

"They will be provided, monsieur. I have the assurance of the Hauptmann Count—of—our best operative in Paris that he can give any help I may ask."

"Have them at eleven o'clock in the morning at the Place de la Bastille, loitering at the south side of the Colonne de Juillet. They are to carry the new Enfield rifle and full equipment. Your operative, the Hauptmann, will understand the details of all that. Punctuality is important, as they must not stand about too long, nor must I be kept waiting, mademoiselle, with a—er—borrowed American automobile. That covers all my needs."

"It shall be at the stroke of eleven, monsieur," she cried. "If—if you only succeed you will have my gratitude forever, monsieur, and the gratitude of the Lieutenant Baron Von Falkenheyn, of all Prussia. And my prayers will follow you across the border."

"Thank you, Mademoiselle Thiezac." Elton smiled. "I shall most probably require the benefit of your prayers."

CHAPTER VII

IN THE DUNGEONS OF VINCENNES

ELTON awoke with a start the next morning. He was conscious of a tension of his nerves before he remembered the reason for it. A glance at his watch told him it was shortly after nine o'clock. He arose, stretched himself and immediately subordinated to his conscious will the slight nervous excitement in which he had emerged from a night's sleep.

He dressed without haste and smiled approvingly at the steadiness of his hand as he shaved himself. There was no telling how one's nerves were going to behave in the face of a crisis and Elton was reassured by the fortunate circumstances of his own complete self-control this morning. In two hours he must set forth on the great adventure. In three hours fortune would either smile or frown upon him, when he presented himself at the *caserne* at Vincennes and put into action the rescue of Von Falkenheyn.

It might all go off simply enough, he assured himself. There was the possibility, if no whim of circumstances intervened, that the rescue of the mysterious prisoner would prove as simple as if the whole procedure had been duly ordered by constituted authority. But it had been his experience that fate had a disagreeable habit of upsetting the best laid plans. By afternoon, instead of being on his way to Switzerland with his unknown ward, he

might be in French custody, himself charged with espionage, and under conditions that might render it impossible for his own service to intervene. Again, even if he got clear of Vincennes, there was the danger of the long run for it across the map of France.

As a matter of ordinary discretion, following his contact with the German shadows of the evening before, he had spent the night at the Hôtel Crillon rather than chance a return to the Palais d'Orsay. Whimsically he had selected the most luxurious suite afforded by the hostelry and now he ordered his breakfast served under one of the high arched windows through which a radiant June sun was streaming. After he had eaten and glanced through the Paris edition of an American daily newspaper, he set out for a leisurely stroll along the Rue de Rivoli with all the outward unconcern of an officer on three-day pass from his regiment.

By force of will his outward demeanor likewise became his inner attitude. Only in a state of perfect self-possession, of conscious unconcern, could he hope to pass through the events of the next four hours. At ten o'clock he strolled into the subway station Chatalet near the junction of Rue de Rivoli with the Rue de Halles and proceeded by easy stages on local subway trains to the Rue de Reuilly where he emerged and walked without haste in the direction of the Seine on the Boulevard Diderot.

From a distance he saw that the first essential in his plan had gone according to schedule. Faithful Walters! He had secured, by his own devices, a large American military automobile belonging to the Paris headquarters. Elton examined the car carefully. Every detail had been carried out—five ample cans of surplus gasoline in the tonneau, a package which contained a French uniform Elton had ordered. The large white numbers painted on the car had been changed, and so covered over that a further change could be effected merely by tearing away strips of olive drab canvas lightly pasted over two figures in each set of numbers on the hood and rear of the car.

Sergeant Walters was not in sight, which meant that he was now well on his way to the little village of Brie Comte Robert, a few kilometers to the south of Vincennes, where he was to take station at a vital crossroads. It had gone hard with the old non-com. that he was reduced to so small and unintelligible a part in whatever adventure was afoot today. But Elton had felt only gratitude that it was unnecessary to draw his faithful assistant into the possible consequences of the visit to Vincennes.

He circled back in the car by an indirect route to the Rue de Reuilly and proceeded northwest on that thoroughfare to the Place de Bastille, so timing his pace as to arrive exactly on the dot of eleven at his point of rendezvous with the four masqueraders. Again German punctuality and attention to detail proved themselves. As he came within sight of the Colonne de Juilliet, four men in American uniform, carrying rifles and light field equipment, appeared before the stately monument. He brought the car to a stop in front of them and gave the sign of identification.

"Hi, get in there, ye louts, and move hearty," bellowed one of the four who wore sergeants' chevrons.

In a brief survey of them as they got into the tonneau of the car, Elton judged three of them to be Norwegians, the fourth clearly English. They were young men, well set up and laboring under no great stress at the impending risk of their lives for gold or excitement, or whatever reward drew them into the Kaiser's secret service.

"Your men know the American manual of arms?" Elton inquired of the Englishman. "Enough, at least, to execute the right shoulder and order arms?"

"Hi'll say they does, sir." The Englishman grinned. "Hits the 'ole night I've drilled the dumbs gettin' ready for ye. Anything special like ye're wantin' of me men, sir?"

"Nothing except to act as an escort,"

said Elton. "Your job will be to say nothing, act like soldiers—and not lose your heads if things go wrong. Do you understand that?"

"Hit's the best thing we does, sir," replied the bogus sergeant. "Hi'll keep me head, no matter wot 'appens, and these lads of mine is more fearin' of me than they is of the French; so 'ave no worryin' becount of me men's behavin's, sir!"

THE Englishman was a muscular little bantam bubbling over with pugnacity, and there was an inherent brutality in his square, rum lined face, a treacherous cruelty in his restless, disagreeable black eyes. Elton saw that the man was one who would not flinch at danger. But he was grateful that he would be finished with the knave's services shortly.

With no further words to these German manikins, he drove direct to the Porte de Chareton, passed out of Paris and sped to Vincennes. He had familiarized himself with every foot of the land by map but since time permitted, he circled the village and the fortress, carefully noting and verifying the routes to the south. Exactly at noon he entered the *caserne* and presented himself at the office of the commandant.

The middle aged French commandant read Elton's orders over without comment, took up his pen, inscribed his approval at the bottom and handed the paper back to Elton. Not even his official curiosity was aroused as to the nature of the American's proposed interview with Von Falkenheyn. He must have concluded that it was a function of counter-espionage activity with which he was not immediately concerned. But where French suspicion failed, French politeness immediately stepped in.

"I shall consider it the great honor, Monsieur le Lieutenant," he announced pleasantly. "Myself, shall I escort you over to the prison at the rear of the *caserne*."

"But I will not impose upon your kindness so far, my Major," Elton replied quickly. "I am grateful that you have countersigned my permission."

The Frenchman gave the inevitable shrug of negation and smiled expansively.

"But it is not the trouble, monsieur," he persisted. "It is the great honor to be of help to an American comrade. Come, I shall take you at once, and then I shall ask that you honor me at lunch."

Having thus decided the issue, the major started out of his office. Elton groaned inwardly. It was a contingency he had not foreseen. Too little cooperation had forced him into this desperate venture; now too much cooperation threatened him with ruin.

"May I be frank, my Major," he intercepted the officer. "My mission is such that I fear the presence of a French officer might disturb Von Falkenheyn. It is really important, I feel, that I go alone—if that is acceptable to you, my Major!"

"Pardon," said the Frenchman. He looked at Elton for a moment with puzzled eyes. "*Pardon, monsieur,*" he added, stepping aside with a grave bow to let Elton pass out alone.

Not even the magnificent discipline that he had learned to impose upon his emotions in moments of stress served to check his uneasy impatience as Elton drove across the parade grounds to the prison and presented his approved order of admission to the junior officer in charge of the cells. It struck him that the lieutenant was inordinately stupid and ox-like of mind as he gaped at the order, ekeing out its purport word by word. Now that Elton had delivered the substituted order he knew that every instant was precious, that any discovery of the ruse would be fatal. And he had a disquieting intuition that the French major did not appear wholly convinced by the clumsy subterfuge that rejected his offer of escort.

"I have no time to waste, monsieur," he prompted the junior officer sharply. "Are my orders not perfectly clear and specific?"

The lieutenant looked up from the order as if stunned by what he read.

"But yes, monsieur, I understand," he

replied. "But I thought Von Falkenheyn was to leave here only—only when our men took him to the rifle butts."

"You have read your orders, Lieutenant!" snapped Elton. "Every moment is precious right now. You will understand—later. Take me to Von Falkenheyn immediately!"

The American's brusk decisiveness set the French lieutenant in motion. He led the way through succeeding steel barriers into a long, dimly lighted cell chamber and brought up before a heavily locked iron door. Beside him marched Elton, ready to leap into the breach of any recurrence of the Frenchman's indecision. Behind them rang the heavy heels of the uniformed escort, the Englishman marching with the cocky swagger of a British grenadier, his three speechless henchmen doing their best to imitate his gait. The escort stopped with a clicking of heels at the door and at a terse command from their leader fixed bayonets.

"Come out, Von Falkenheyn!" the French officer commanded in his own tongue as he swung the steel door open upon a black hole of a dungeon.

THERE emerged a slight, very young man whose large, haunted brown eyes were making a pathetic show of brave unconcern. Although he was predominantly of German type, Elton saw, even in the daze of the moment, that he lacked the frigid, arrogant assurance, the repellent self-sufficiency, of the Prussian military caste, that he bolstered a flagging courage by conscious effort. His face was deathly pale and haggard but clean shaven, his hair carefully brushed, and not even the coarse, shapeless prison denims effaced from Von Falkenheyn's appearance a certain well groomed aspect and an air of excellent breeding.

"I had no warning that I was to die today," he said in French, enunciating each word distinctly against a telltale tremor. He swallowed visibly. "But if it's my time, I am ready, messieurs."

At a peremptory motion from Elton, the four masqueraders arranged themselves, one on each side of Von Falkenheyn and two in rear, and followed Elton back down the cell chamber at a brisk gait. Elton's heart broke its mooring, pounding in his ears above the ring of iron shod heels on flagstone floor. The French lieutenant leaped nimbly ahead to draw the final heavy bolts of the outer doors of steel. They passed through the last barrier into the prison bureau, only a few yards intervening now to where the automobile stood purring just under the broad stone steps.

Sight of the sunshine beating in at the windows, the first breath of fresh air, stimulated Elton with a sudden revival of hope. He had to fight back an impulse to run the last few steps, to command the others to race Von Falkenheyn into the car. Five meters to the door, a dozen paces to the car, yet the distance across the room seemed to multiply into a kilometer. The French attendant stepped aside to his desk as they came into his office. He picked up the strange order again, as if to assure himself once more that his senses played him no weird prank. Elton jumped ahead and held open the office door. The others passed him. He saw the car idling easily, and started toward the steps ready to leap to his place at the wheel. Then his uneasy intuitions proved themselves. On the steps, already mounting towards the prison door, was the French commandant.

"*Vive Dieu!*" shrieked the major, his eyes starting from their sockets at sight of Von Falkenheyn. "But what is the meaning of this, monsieur!"

"Stand aside!" Elton cut back at him. "Your lieutenant will explain. I know what I am doing."

"Impossible. *Halte!*" cried the Frenchman, waving his arms as he rushed inside to demand of his assistant the reason for this outrageous proceeding.

"Snap into it!" roared Elton to the others.

They needed no prompting. The Englishman seized the hesitant Von Falkenheyn in his arms and threw him bodily

into the tonneau while his henchmen scrambled into the car as it got under way.

Five hundred meters to the portal of the *caserne*, five hundred yards across an open parade ground dotted with French soldiers, while an armed sentry stood at the gate, a bayoneted rifle sloped across his shoulder. The heavy car gained momentum slowly. Elton, as he shifted gears, threw the throttle gradually wide open in the knowledge that the *caserne* would swiftly become a place of hissing French missiles. It would require but short time for the two French officers to exhaust their expletives and put their energies into action.

They were halfway across the parade grounds, the car now stepping into its gait, when he heard the excited cries of the French officers above the roar of the car. He saw, too, that the sentinel at the narrow, steel flanked exit had caught the alarm and stood with his head craned forward to catch the meaning of the excited cries and gesticulations of the now frenzied commandant. The car was rushing swiftly upon the gate when the sentry appeared suddenly to sense that he was to stop the speeding car. He snapped his rifle from his shoulder and stood with the muzzle half-raised.

But Elton, his mind now clear, moved with swift instinct to meet this menace. He met indecision with decision. Holding the car on its course with one hand he pointed a tense finger to one side of the sentry and shouted at him, a maneuver that threw the soldier into a fresh jumble of confusion. It must have struck him as incredible that he was to fire upon an American car. And by the time he could collect his slow wits the car had flashed into the street, swerved to the south and was swirling ahead at a terrific speed, screened by a heavy cloud of reddish dust.

A spluttering rattle of musketry broke out from the *caserne*. The shrill rasping of high powered bullets rang in Elton's ears as they passed into the village. Then the road became a lane between two protecting rows of ancient oak trees that sheltered them from effective fire. Elton set the throttle wide open and passed through Vincennes to the south, bearing to the east toward Nogent through which village he passed a few minutes later at the speed of an express train.

The speedometer registered sixty, then seventy miles an hour. The powerful car swerved from side to side of the graded road. Elton's pulse quickened to the speed of the car, to the beckon of the open road, to the consciousness that victory loomed now ahead. In a few minutes, he well knew, the pursuit would be organized and roaring behind him. As soon as the French commandant could man an automobile, to be followed by other automobiles. Shortly the road would be filled with cars loaded with *poilus*. The alarm would be spread by telegraph and telephone as soon as the course of the fugitives had been determined. But henceforward it was a game of wits in the open and Elton's forebodings had vanished.

CHAPTER VIII

ACROSS THE MAP OF FRANCE

WHEN the car had penetrated into the Bois de la Grange a few kilometers south of the crossroads northeast of Boissy St. Leger, Elton brought it to a stop. He had no need of shouting the masqueraders into hiding. They jumped from the car and scattered into the woods, two to the east, two to the west. Elton gaped at the transformation in them. They were now fully uniformed in the field gray of French infantry, an emergency masquerade they must have carried in their light packs.

Leutnant Baron Von Falkenheyn, who had sat hunched in the driver's seat beside Elton without a word, sat up as the car moved off again.

"I do not understand, monsieur, what is happening," he exclaimed. "It all seems most—most extraordinary."

"I am taking you to Switzerland, Herr Leutnant," replied Elton, without shifting his eyes from the road. "If all goes well we will cross the border before the sun is up tomorrow."

"Switzerland!" cried Von Falkenheyn. "I thought I was going to the—the rifle range. Are you not an Allied officer, monsieur?"

"The orders of Herr Hauptmann Eggiwil," said Elton. "We have cheated the French—and you will soon be safe in Germany."

Von Falkenheyn merely slumped back in his seat without a word. Elton, though he dared not take his eyes from the burning road, sensed the Prussian's strange response to the information that he had been miraculously snatched from death. Von Falkenheyn sat staring dumbly ahead under whatever emotion gripped him.

"You will find under the rear seat a French uniform," Elton shouted. "Change into it—quickly, Herr Leutnant."

The Prussian climbed obediently over the top of the seat and reappeared shortly in the uniform of a French lieutenant of the staff. Elton shot a quick glance at him and saw with satisfaction that cap and tunic fitted well enough, a stroke of luck since he had been compelled to guess at the sizes.

"Soon we'll put them off our trail," Elton announced. "They'll never catch us now, Herr Leutnant."

Von Falkenheyn received the cheering assurance in silence. But presently he sat up in his seat and leaned close to his rescuer.

"May I ask a great favor, my friend?" he said. "That we not go by way of Switzerland?"

"But why not?" Elton shouted back his astonishment.

"It is not of myself I think, please believe me. But the French have learned of the leak in their lines at Belfort. For days they have been setting a great trap. We would only fall into it—tonight."

"There is no choice, Herr Leutnant. But how did you learn of a trap such as you speak of?"

"The French laugh at it at Vincennes, my friend. And we have the safer route through Spain. That can not fail us, though it is only for you that I fear."

"Spain would only mean—internment," retorted Elton. "That is worse than the risk of a French musket."

"It was by way of Spain I came to France," Von Falkenheyn persisted. "My friends will protect us."

"But Spain is not Germany, Herr Leutnant, and my orders were to see you into Germany."

"Spain is the surest route into Germany these days," Von Falkenheyn rejoined quickly. "Also it is the safest—as you will see."

Even while they debated the route, Elton was conscious of a growing rift in the inflexible purpose that had set his course toward Switzerland. His determination had received its first jolt when the German spoke of the French trap in Upper Alsace. It fitted in too closely with his knowledge of the gap at Belfort to be passed as mere vacant rumor. Added to that was the earnestness of Von Falkenheyn's pleas, his certainty of safety by way of the Pyrenees to the south.

The car shot through the tiny village of Brie Comte Robert. In the distance, at the vital road junction eight hundred meters due ahead, was a speck in the road that grew quickly into the stature of a man. The man became a soldier, an American soldier with side arms and the sleeve brassard of an American M. P. He occupied the center of the road, his hand raised in silent command that the car stop.

As he slowed down, Elton still was gripped in the throes of the uncertainty Von Falkenheyn had put in his mind. There was no time for further debate. He must make up his mind now, before he reached the branching of the road, before he parleyed with the soldier. Sergeant Walters expected the car to turn east here. It was Walters' mission to turn the cars of the pursuit on toward the south, the direction of the Swiss border. How communicate to him a change of plan—in the presence of Von Falkenheyn?

As the car rolled to a stop in front of the non-com, Elton made his decision. He would head for the Spanish frontier. Walters' good sense would grasp the change and divert the pursuit to the eastward.

"Shut her down, sir! My orders are hold all cars for investigation!" shouted Walters as the car came abreast of him.

"Watching for that Kaiser-hound who was yanked out of the *caserne* at Vincennes?" demanded Elton.

"The same, sir!"

"Seen anything of them yet—any suspicious cars?"

"Nothing, sir. Yours is the first car this way."

"Well, out of the way, Sergeant. We're on the same trail and with no time to lose here. Understand?"

Walters stepped back and saluted. Von Falkenheyn may have read fear of rank in the American soldier's woebegone face, but Elton knew the real misery that gnawed Walters' soul at sight of the adventure in which he was denied a greater rôle. Elton turned to Walters as the car moved again.

"Turn all those French cars behind us to the east," he commanded. "We'll cover the routes to the south. Understand?"

"Very good, sir."

THERE was a certainty, an understanding in Walters' voice that told Elton the pursuit cars would be effectively shuttled off on the road turning due east through Mormant and Provins, thence into the road net leading to the Swiss frontier.

"Very cleverly handled, my friend," exclaimed Von Falkenheyn as the car gathered momentum again. "A very simple fellow—that American soldier. Are your non-coms mostly like that in the American Army?"

"No, that one is rather exceptional, I'd say." Elton smiled.

The road net to the south and west presented to Elton no grave problem. He would drive straight to Orléans, thence to Tours; and once south of Tours he was on familiar terrain. Logically he had studied the roads from Vincennes to the south to observe the probable course of the pursuit under his first plan. The route to Melun, thence through the forest of Fontainebleau, lay due ahead without complicated intersection or branchings. At the village of Fontainebleau he needed only turn to the right to have the road to Orléans. The main route through Orléans was the road to Tours. His greatest security, he thought, lay in keeping to the main highways, the route followed by American military cars on official pilgrimages.

In the forest of Fontainebleau he stopped long enough to remove the strips of O. D. cloth with which Walters had hidden the true number of the car. He also secreted Von Falkenheyn's discarded prison denims, removed the military police brassard from his own arm, replaced his overseas cap with a formal uniform cap, and took rank as a captain by changing his shoulder bars. Thus fortified against undue suspicion, he resumed the journey in a rising confidence that the Spanish frontier was thereafter a matter of mere—kilometers.

In passing through villages, Elton slowed down to the leisurely speed of two Allied officers in no great haste. But along the countryside he held the pace of a limited express train. They roared on without speaking, Von Falkenheyn seeming to sense that the American did not wish any distraction from the whirring road.

The sun was yet high in the heavens when they passed Orléans. Dusk had not yet thickened into darkness when they reached the ancient city of Tours, headquarters of the American Service of Supply. A few kilometers to the south and west of Tours, Elton stopped to refill the capacious gas tank, also to refuel his own empty stomach from the emergency rations he carried along in his musette bag. Von Falkenheyn accepted a share of the coarse fare with a polite expression of gratitude, but merely nibbled at it abstractedly and without relish. And Elton noted that his ward had fallen into a mood of unaccountable depression, a humor from which he seemed unable or unwilling to rally himself at a time when his spirits should have been soaring.

Poitiers slipped past before midnight, Angouleme well before daylight. The grind began to tell upon Elton but he rejected Von Falkenheyn's repeated offers of relief and clung to the wheel. For breakfast, the all but indigestible field rations again. During the last fifty miles into Bordeaux, Elton dallied with a temptation to go direct to the Chapeau Rouge and eat his fill once he was at the metropolis of the south. But he set his jaw against such a risk and drove resolutely into the long, grilling course to Bayonne.

His mind was volplaning on him when Elton finally piloted the car into Biarritz. It was at Biarritz that Von Falkenheyn claimed friends who would take them across the Spanish frontier to Hendaye. The German directed the way to a great château of white stone, set in the rolling hills of the most exclusive section of the fashionable French watering place. Here they would find safe refuge—and learn the lay of the land, Von Falkenheyn said. Elton knew that his own strength was unequal to the task of going on to Hendaye without rest. Nor did he wish to risk the final crisis of their flight unless in the full possession of his strength and faculties.

Von Falkenheyn lifted the carved knocker at the door of the château with the easy confidence of a man who is certain of his welcome. He would have stepped in as the door opened, except that the French maid barred the way.

"Monsieur?" she inquired frigidly.

"But Madame Roanne is expecting me," said Von Falkenheyn.

"The *carte*, if you please, monsieur?" said the maid, unimpressed by the visitor's pretention.

"Please inform madame that a dear friend is here—from Paris—and she will understand," Von Falkenheyn said patiently.

"You will wait where you are, messieurs, until I have consulted madame, if you please."

She closed the door in their faces. Some minutes passed before it opened again, slowly at first, until the mistress caught sight of her visitors. Then Madame Roanne herself threw the door wide open.

"A thousand pardons," she exclaimed with a deep courtesy. "Oh, that I have kept your—"

"I am the Herr Leutnant Von Falkenheyn, if you have forgotten!" the Prussian officer cut in quickly.

Madame Roanne, flustered out of her faculties by Von Falkenheyn's appearance, stammered a welcome, told of her gratitude that he had returned to Biarritz, and apologized again that he had not been instantly admitted to the château.

"We are very fatigued, madame," Von Falkenheyn replied, with small attention to her polite chatter. "Will you please arrange for my friend's comfort at once?"

CHAPTER IX

A CLOSED FRONTIER

IT REQUIRED several minutes for Elton to orient himself when he opened his eyes from a sleep of exhaustion. The luxurious sleeping room, a bright June sun peeping in through exquisite laces under rich tapestry portières, a faint hum of the distant surf. As they came to a focus in his mind he sprang out of bed and hurriedly got into his uniform in the jarring recollection that this was only a momentary oasis.

A servant appeared with the announcement in French that breakfast would be served him when he was ready, on the broad, tree bowered terrace at the side of the château. Thought of breakfast stirred him pleasantly, a breakfast that was to be something more than cold salmon out of a can, hard bread and stale cheese, components of the ration upon which he and Von Falkenheyn had subsisted in their flight from Vincennes. But a leisurely breakfast on the terrace struck him as a bit imprudent. Time enough for that after they crossed the frontier at Hendaye and reached San Sebastian where their security no longer would hang by a slender thread.

He found Von Falkenheyn seated alone, gazing abstractedly out to sea in the same melancholy mood of the day before. At sight of the American, Von Falkenheyn roused himself and stood up with a forced smile and an easy German salute.

"You have rested well, my friend?" the Prussian inquired.

"Almost too well." Elton smiled. "And you?"

"Indifferently. You see, my friend, a troubled conscience is a poor bed fellow."

As they sat at breakfast, Elton saw that Von Falkenheyn's heavy mood persisted. His eyes were no less haunted than when he came from the cell at Vincennes thinking he faced execution. Now that he was able for the first time to appraise the mysterious Von Falkenheyn, Elton found himself more sorely perplexed than ever at fitting such a man into the rôle of a German military operative in enemy territory. The French theory he dismissed at once as highly improbable—that Von Falkenheyn was the dreaded Prussian spy, Von Kastellaun. Such a man as Von Kastellaun would have a manner, a *savoir-faire*, a distinctive, decisive personality, no matter how subtly it might express itself. Von Falkenheyn's rôle, that of a disingenious, whimsical, perhaps impulsive and pampered young man who suffered just now from some deep depression, was not a masquerade, Elton concluded. It was the Prussian's real personality.

"I had expected to see you in a happier mood, Herr Leutnant," Elton stirred him.

"Pardon, if I depress you," Von Falkenheyn replied. "But I have so little reason to feel gay at the present time."

"Is it not something to escape a French firing squad—to see your own home so near ahead?" rejoined Elton.

The young officer picked gloomily at his breakfast for some moments before he looked up at Elton.

"Do not think I am not grateful to you, my friend," he said. "I will always remember what you did in my service; and yet I am oppressed today by the thought that there are worse things than death—death in the service of the Fatherland."

"Perhaps, if I understood what you mean, I might be able to agree, Herr Leutnant," Elton said gently.

"Failure is a terrible thing, my friend. Failure, another failure. Always I seem to meet failure."

Von Falkenheyn's voice was filled with despair as he said this. He sat back from the table and lighted a cigaret, his hand quivering.

"I will be laughed at—behind my back," he went on bitterly. "Always behind my back. That great shaggy bear Von Hindenburg will grunt his mirth at my expense within the hearing of his staff. The fox Von Ludendorff will have that sly wink of his at mess. The Crown Prince will jibe openly and swear that I am a fool in the hearing of whoever listens. He will throw it in my face that had they not sent for me, had they not rescued me, my own folly would have me rotting in a French grave!"

Elton searched Von Falkenheyn's face. Had his mind been touched by his close call with death at Vincennes that he raved thus of the masters of Germany?

"Well, here I am," the young officer added, pulling himself suddenly together and forcing a wry smile. "I have it to face, and at least I will offer them no excuse."

"It was the high command, then, that sent you to Paris, Herr Leutnant, on a mission of great importance?" Elton asked.

Von Falkenheyn gave a bitter laugh.

"The high command has offered me no mission. It was on their account that I came—of my own wish. I thought I would be in Paris when the Imperial army marched in—that I would have arrangements for the reception of his Imperial Majesty the Emperor well in hand. Pardon my vanity, but I had even pictured myself smoking a cigaret astride the Porte de la Villette when their august Excel-

lencies came driving into Paris. Instead, it is they who have the laugh—another laugh—a laugh that I will not see, though I will feel it just the same."

"Your generals are sure then—you are sure—that they will reach Paris, Herr Leutnant?"

Instead of answering immediately, Von Falkenheyn got up and walked the length of the terrace. He stood looking at the sea, then returned and resumed his seat very thoughtfully.

"If they do not, my friend," he said in a low, tense voice; "if the Imperial army fails again—in the master drive on Paris—nothing matters. Nothing! It will be the end."

But before Elton could press that startling revelation, Von Falkenheyn jumped to his feet in an impulsive change of humor.

"Come, I have blown enough of my clouds into your sky," he rallied. "I have some good news, as well, my friend. Madame Roanne has been in touch with my friends. All is arranged for us, for tonight. Tonight we cross the frontier into Spain, through a safe pass in the hills, disguised as Basques and astride an excellent pair of Spanish mules. By this hour of tomorrow we shall be loafing in a comfortable villa at San Sebastian."

"And from San Sebastian, Herr Leutnant?" Elton reminded him.

"Ah, yes; that is well arranged too, my friend. Already our 'cab' has been asked for by wireless from Madrid, Before the week is gone I shall be showing you about Berlin."

They were interrupted by the appearance of Mme. Roanne who bustled on to the terrace in a state of high excitement. She leaned across the table and spoke in a whisper.

"The courier, Herr Leutnant; the courier is here again. Herr Wahlsheid demands that he must see your—your—the Herr Leutnant at once, your Excellency."

"What does that pestilence wish now?" said Von Falkenheyn. "Very well, you may show him in if you wish."

MME. ROANNE ushered to the terrace a thick set man with a pallid, masklike face who wore the uniform of a British naval officer. He strode across to Von Falkenheyn, saluted and spoke in German.

"I regret to inform the—the Herr Leutnant that there has been a change in the plan," he said in the stiff official voice of an adjutant at formation. "It is no longer possible to cross the frontier into Spain."

"What are you saying, Feldwebel Wahlsheid?" remonstrated Von Falkenheyn. "Less than two hours ago you reported everything in readiness."

"But since then we have new information, Herr Leutnant. We learn that the French are pouring men secretly into the Pyrenees, along the coastline, into the villages. They are throwing out a net through which no fish may pass."

"A rumor, no doubt, Wahlsheid. Are you, too, getting a touch of French nerves from serving too long in Gascony?"

"A report, Herr Leutnant, not a rumor." Wahlsheid held his ground. "It comes from our agents in Bordeaux. The Americans, too, are throwing out their net. At this moment men are coming to Biarritz. They will be disguised as Spanish travelers, and they will investigate every stranger in Biarritz."

Von Falkenheyn turned to Elton with a slight smile and lighted a cigaret.

"Then they must have missed us on the Swiss frontier, my friend," he said. "Our agents at Bordeaux are to be depended upon, and it seems that San Sebastian is farther away than we had thought a moment ago."

"But the American auto, Herr Leutnant!" exclaimed Elton. "If men are coming here they will be attracted by an American car standing in Mme. Roanne's garage. We must—"

"Give that no further thought, my friend," the Prussian interrupted. "Wahlsheid already has attended to that. Even before we were abed last night Wahlsheid thought of it; he drove the car up into the Pyrenees where he ran it over the steepest

cliff. Before the wreck is discovered we will be driving a German car."

He turned back to the German henchman. The Prussian officer in him cropped out.

"Well, what further stupidity have you to offer, Wahlsheid? First you say the frontier is unsafe; then you say Biarritz is unsafe; so I suppose it only remains for you to add that I will hide under the château until the war is ended, yes?"

"*Jawohl*, Herr Leutnant, but the Herr Leutnant leaves Biarritz tonight. Fortune has played into our hands, Herr Leutnant, as well as against us."

"I suppose you are routing me by the Bordeaux Express through Paris?" sneered Von Falkenheyn. "That might be no more silly, after all, than your fears of the Spanish frontier."

"May Feldwebel Wahlsheid speak with the Herr Leutnant alone?" pleaded Wahlsheid.

Von Falkenheyn got up with a show of annoyance. Instead of dismissing Elton from the terrace, he went with the German secret agent into the château. When he returned, alone, a few minutes later, his face was wracked by a return of his gloomy depression.

"It is arranged, my friend," he said dispiritedly. "We leave tonight."

"You do not appear reassured by Wahlsheid's arrangement, Herr Leutnant," said Elton, intent on instant protest against any plan of wild flight that might endanger them at this last moment of their escape.

"It is not that—not danger," said Von Falkenheyn. "It is the humiliation—fresh fuel for the mirth of the fox and the shaggy bear comes out of tonight, my friend. But we will leave the château at eleven o'clock, when there is no moon."

"The plan, Herr Leutnant?" Elton pressed him. "Surely, after having seen you this far, I am entitled to know whether the move is tenable. Where is it we go from here?"

"I am sorry I can not say, my friend," said Von Falkenheyn. "You must leave that to my discretion, and you may be sure that we are only shortening our route. Until eleven, then, we must keep to our apartments. Biarritz is no longer safe to us—although to me that does not matter much."

CHAPTER X

ON TO BERLIN

IT WAS a few minutes of eleven o'clock that night before the restlessness in which Elton had paced the apartment for hours was relieved by a tap at his door. There was a raw edge to his nerves from the mysterious secrecy in which their next move had been withheld from him. Where, with the frontier flooded with soldiers and operatives, Biarritz itself closely guarded, were they to turn? Since he had learned that under the château was an intricate network of underground chambers, it was his thought that discretion demanded delay until the French vigil had relaxed. A week, two weeks; time was precious to him, every day of delay in completing his mission was important. But delay was preferable to total failure; time was not to be sacrificed to ordinary caution.

He gave an involuntary exclamation as Von Falkenheyn entered the room. The Prussian had discarded the French garb and was attired in the uniform of the Prussian Guards, a field uniform, with spiked helmet and high polished boots, field glasses slung over his shoulders, a dispatch case and side arms.

"The hour is here, my friend," said Von Falkenheyn solemnly. "The way is clear and we leave on the schedule."

Elton gasped at the Prussian's mad effrontery. In a Prussian uniform his arrest would be swift and certain if they came upon the French patrols.

"You are not leaving here in that uniform, Herr Leutnant!" he exclaimed, his words more a command than a question.

"Why not?" responded Von Falkenheyn. "It will at least take the edge off the mirth at the staff. Am I to save no vestige of my self-respect?"

"What chance have you in passing through France in German uniform, Herr Leutnant? It is madness. You would never get out of Biarritz."

"We would be seized leaving Biarritz no matter what our disguise, my friend," said Von Falkenheyn. "The village hums with the secret service; but we will fool them. Come, you must trust to me this time."

Since Von Falkenheyn's insistence left him no alternative, Elton followed him out of the château. They proceeded across the dark terrace and down the rolling hillside toward the surf, avoiding the steps that led to the château. Every few meters they halted until word came from shadowy figures working ahead as a patrol that the coast was clear.

When they came on to the thick loose sand of the broad beach to the south of Biarritz, their escort drew back. Von Falkenheyn, in full uniform, his spiked helmet silhouetted clearly under the gray light of the stars, quickened his pace. Elton's heart was in his mouth as they reached the surf and turned to the south on the hard sand next to the water.

A French challenge rang out in the darkness. Von Falkenheyn walked on coolly, without increasing his gait. Elton heard a pattering of feet and thought he saw dark shadows moving toward them on the beach. The rays of a flashlight tried to pick them out from the distance. He cursed the folly that had brought Von Falkenheyn out in that Prussian uniform. It stripped them of all hope of evasion once they were stopped.

At a moment when Elton saw inevitable capture closing hard upon them, Von Falkenheyn turned into the surf. In an instant they were pushing a small, flat bottomed rowboat through the breakers. They got clear of the breakers just as the French net behind them closed at the shoreline. Cries and challenges reached them above the rumblings of the water. Flashlights played excitedly on the water. A spurt of flame and another, followed by the crackle of pistols.

Darkness and the rolling of the sea screened them from accurate fire although bullets began pattering about them as they rowed. Von Falkenheyn drew his own pistol to return the fire. Elton put out a hand to restrain him, then withdrew it. He remembered that in the mad game of war that gripped the world his mission was more valuable than a life or two. Besides, there was small risk that the German's bullets would find a human target in the darkness. And a return of the fire would unsettle the aim of the French patrol on the shore.

Flashlights and gunflashes multiplied swiftly. Elton saw that some of them were moving to the north. The searchers were making for a boat to give chase, he thought. At a hundred meters from shore, they left the rowboat for a long, rakish gasoline launch that was idling in wait for them. As soon as they had transferred from the rowboat the launch set out with its exhaust pounding the air like the rattle of a machine gun, a white trail of foam behind.

Elton gasped at the audacious folly of the maneuver. No matter what heels the boat had, the French need only telephone to their coast patrols plying the vital coast line north of the point of rocks at Fontarabie. Swift French launches would put into the Gascony bay, driving on them from front and rear before they could hope to reach San Sebastian.

"Ah, now if we are not careful, my friend, we will get a good wetting."

Von Falkenheyn shouted this in Elton's ear as the launch suddenly slacked its speed.

A black shadow loomed up out of the water, a sharp thrust of rock it might have been, topped with the silhouette of a human head and torso. Then, in another moment, the night revealed to Elton the conning tower of a submarine, its decks awash, long thin black lines roughly outlined fore and aft of the conning tower.

"Ahoy!" shouted Von Falkenheyn. "Two to come aboard—the Herr Leutnant and one other."

"Catch the lines!" said a calm, penetrating voice from the conning tower.

"And look sharp that you do not have a bath!"

As the launch swerved alongside, Von Falkenheyn caught a rope that was tossed him from a man on the washy deck of the submarine. He handed it to Elton and caught another for himself. They tied the ropes about their waists and jumped to the side of the vessel, catching the low rails and nimbly climbing aboard. The sea rolled across the deck, wetting them to the knees before they could reach the iron ladder that mounted the conning tower. Von Falkenheyn went on ahead up the four rungs.

"My dear Korvettankapitan," he addressed the submarine commander who stood beside the hatch. "It was no wish of mine that you be put to this inconvenience."

"I am glad enough to find you safe, Herr Leutnant," said the commander. "I did not understand there was to be a second passenger."

"An American—of our secret service, my dear Rheydt," Von Falkenheyn replied.

"Will you go below at once, please, Herr Leutnant?" said the officer. He ignored Elton. "We will be glad to share with you such comfort as we have. But it will not be long. I am sailing direct to Wilhelmshaven."

THE STIFLING heat of the hold, and the stink of burning oils in the thick, vitiated air, repelled Elton as he climbed into the bowels of the ship. Von Falkenheyn was escorted forward, doubtless to an officer's cubbyhole, while Elton went aft into a dank hole filled with swinging hammocks. The craft already was under way, running with mildly humming engines and only a slight pitch in the mild Gascony sea. But the thought of being locked underseas in this huge coffin stirred Elton with discomfort, a tension of his excellent nerves which he conquered with difficulty.

Staring eyes greeted his American uniform. Members of the crew passed back and forth through the room for no other evident purpose than to view the strange passenger who had been brought aboard off the French coast. Elton saw that the crew were mostly very young men, little more than overgrown boys, who laughed and jested among themselves tonight in high good humor. From their badinage he gathered that they were on their way home after a wide cruise in which many Allied vessels had been sent to the bottom.

"You are a German officer—in disguise?" one of them finally addressed him, a response to the mass curiosity of the crew.

"*Nicht verstehen*," Elton replied.

They speculated for a time upon the mystery of a passenger who spoke no German. No, he could hardly be a prisoner. Unless a prisoner of the German secret service. A spy! One of them finally hit upon that theory and the others accepted it.

Elton listened in the hope that their conversation might clear up the mystery of Von Falkenheyn. But that enigma remained in darkness. To the crew he was merely a German officer whom they had been compelled to pick up. Elton gathered that there had been some complaint at being forced out of their course on such a mission, after weeks of daring exploits. But that only deepened the puzzle in his own mind. Certainly an ocean cruising U-boat would not be withdrawn from its business of destruction for the convenience of any ordinary mortal.

A buzzer signaled lights out. Talking ceased thereafter and the men turned to. Elton groped his way into his hammock in the dismal thought that he faced an endless night of sleeplessness in that suffocating hole. There were no sounds except the hum of the engines and the broken snores of gunners and oilers who dropped easily into slumber. He wondered that he was not sleepy after the driving events of the past week. He even cursed German caution in withholding from him the secret of their transportation. Had he known, he need not have put in the day asleep.

But before he was conscious of what had happened, he found himself blinking again into a bright electric light right over his head. Men were moving about. The air was pure and clear now and the boat was plunging ahead in a rolling sea under high speed. A sailor was shaking him gently.

"Der Leutnant is vanted for'd mit der cap'n mess," said the sailor.

Elton had slept in his uniform. He smiled his gratitude at the unsuspected fatigue that had seized him and held him in its grip through the night. The engines were roaring now and the boat seemed fairly to leap through the water. Elton followed the soldier to a cubbyhole forward where breakfast was served him alone on a diminutive table some two feet by three. He was returning again to his quarters when he heard Von Falkenheyn's voice calling to him from the conning tower.

"Come up, my friend, for a bit of fresh air and a smoke," the Prussian invited.

HE MOUNTED the iron rungs into the conning tower and emerged through the hatch on to the cramped tower deck to find the U-boat running full on the surface as blithely as a yacht on a pleasure cruise. Von Falkenheyn was leaning heavily against the stout iron railing, which struck him at the waist; he was smoking a cigaret. The commander was standing close beside him in casual conversation, while the watch officer and chief engineer were scanning the sea all about them through powerful glasses.

"My dear Korvettankapitan," said Von Falkenheyn in German, "this is the American of whom I have been telling you, the Herr Leutnant Steuben to whom I am so greatly indebted."

The submarine commander turned slightly, straightened himself and bowed stiffly from the waist, but without speaking or extending his hand.

"Is it not strange, my friend?" Von Falkenheyn turned to Elton. "Korvettankapitan Rheydt speaks no English, you speak no German; yet you both serve the same fine cause."

He repeated his words in German to the commander.

"I can never forgive the Americans for what they do," said Rheydt, without lowering the glasses which he had raised to cover his apparent annoyance at Elton's appearance.

"But we must remember, my dear Rheydt," Von Falkenheyn rejoined, "that this American gentleman has done us a good service—if saving my poor neck can be so considered. We must not condemn him, then, for their sins."

"It is the Americans who cause us all our fears," Rheydt said through tightened lips. "It is because of them that I must drive—drive—drive. No sooner do we reach Kiel, than back we must go, always because of the Americans; and sometimes I fear that we shall not be able to stop the avalanche."

Rheydt lowered his glasses and turned sharply to Von Falkenheyn.

"I meant to ask," he added, "if the army has struck yet. We have been without news."

"Do not fear, my dear Korvettankapitan," said Von Falkenheyn. "In another fortnight we will be on the march to Paris. You will be taking fuel at Le Havre when next you come in from the sea."

"Or in hell, if the army does not succeed this time," Rheydt muttered bitterly.

Von Falkenheyn flicked his cigaret into the water and watched it with a quizzical air as it swept behind.

"The shaggy bear and the wily fox, even they know that, my dear Korvettankapitan," said Von Falkenheyn grimly. "Therefore they will not dare to fail, no matter what price they have to pay for Paris."

They lapsed thereafter into commonplaces concerning the voyage, the weather, the prospect of coming within sight of Heligoland on the second day after tomorrow. Elton learned that the U-boat had been on its way home from American waters when intercepted by radio orders from Nauen. Twenty-one steamers were

to their credit on the cruise, including one transport which they had picked up off the coast of Ireland on their way out. They were down now to three tons of fuel oil which should see them through comfortably—if they went direct by the English Channel into the North Sea, rather than the safer but more circuitous way around the British Isles. Rheydt said he had no fear of the British nets and floating mines in the channel, and less of the British destroyers. He need only show them his heels and outguess their depth bombs by his adroit maneuvering, he boasted.

Elton had been looking abstractedly out to sea, filling his lungs with the invigorating salt air, pretending not to have understood the momentous exchange between Rheydt and Von Falkenheyn. He shifted for a better view of the U-boat commander. The fellow had piqued his curiosity by his voice, his whole appearance. Nor did a closer view clear up the conflict between the man's rôle and his appearance. Rheydt's features were more to be expected at the first violin of a symphony orchestra than at the control of a U-boat, Elton thought. Or the kind of man one would expect to find writing dreamy poems in some vine clad terrace on the banks of the Rhone. His eyes were large and black and the light in them was soft and thoughtful, rather than hard or defiant. His mouth was full and well formed and escaped a straight line by merging into a sad smile at the corners. He did not even affect the bristling Prussian pompadour of the hour, but wore his black hair long and carefully brushed back off his broad, receding forehead. Rheydt, moreover, was slender, narrow across the shoulders and stood with a very slight stoop. His voice alone betrayed the tempered steel that must have lain behind that gentle exterior. It was clear and incisive, the voice of Prussian war command.

"We are off St. Nazaire," the commander was saying. "If we can only stay above the surface, by tonight we will enter—"

"*Donnerwetter!*" The voice of the lookout officer shattered Rheydt's observation.

They turned with one accord at the alarm, to the northwest where the lookout officer pointed a tense hand. A black smudge, the size of a matchhead, had thrust itself above the horizon. The commander studied it through his glasses without emotion as it grew slowly into a thin black pennant streaming down the sea.

"It is coming across our course," he remarked quietly. "We will go below."

CHAPTER XI

SUBMARINE BAIT

THE ENGINEER had leaped through the manhole at the first alarm and disappeared into the bowels of the craft. The others followed without haste, Elton climbing down into the conning tower immediately behind Von Falkenheyn and stopping with him in the commander's station. Three bells rang through the ship, at brief intervals, at the touch of Rheydt's unhurried finger. At the first, the hatch overhead banged shut. The second bell was followed by a toning down of the hum of engines as the main propeller engine was shut off. At the third ring, there was a patter of feet as the entire crew hurried to stations ready for emergency.

"Down to asparagus depth!" ordered the commander.

There was a disquieting sensation of settling and Elton saw the green water swirl slowly up to devour the narrow strip of daylight. The engines became quiet, a mere hum of the electric motors as the submarine went under.

Rheydt ordered the periscope out and stood with his eye glued to the glass while the submarine held to its course straight ahead at a slow pace.

"*Ei!*" barked Rheydt suddenly. "*Herr Gott*—but what a pity!"

"A shot, my dear Korvettankapitan?" Von Falkenheyn asked, his voice betraying a forced effort at self-control.

"A shot in a thousand, Herr Leutnant," said Rheydt.

He stood focusing the long eye of the submarine here and there and presently began swaying from one foot to the other, as if to relieve an impotent passion. His thoughts broke into short, sharp exclamations.

"*Himmel*, what a target! A great transport—it is steaming to St. Nazaire with two destroyers fore and two aft. *Ach, Gott!* It is the—the *Fatherland* herself, that the swine have named *Leviathan*. She carries six thousand troops—perhaps ten!"

The commander's voice became a wail.

"*Gott in Himmel*—to be denied such a target!"

"Do not pause—on—on my account, my Korvettankapitan!" Von Falkenheyn spoke up in a strained voice. "If you wish I will order you to fire."

"Not even at the order of his Imperial Majesty could I fire, Herr Leutnant," cried Rheydt. "My last tube I fired yesterday—and to sink nothing more than a slimy British tanker!"

"Down periscope—dive quick!"

The commander interrupted his own unhappy discourse with the bark of command. The ship quickly settled into total blindness, to an underseas course at a depth of fifty meters. The German had overstepped discretion in his empty lust. The thin, white trail behind the periscope had caught the alert eyes of the monster transport's convoy.

"The hawks are swooping down upon us now," said Rheydt. "But I will fool them."

Rheydt settled back in his seat and locked his hands. His eyes were looking straight ahead, his mouth set as he imposed an iron discipline upon himself. There was nothing he could do now to affect the issue, unless to order an occasional change of course. Shortly he ordered a depth of sixty meters and a turn smartly to the direction of shore.

The submarine had barely completed this maneuver when there was a rumble as of distant thunder, followed by a heavy vibration of the craft. A second roar followed, a third and a fourth.

"They are not even close with their depth bombs," said Rheydt. "Soon we shall rise and show them our heels. They will not dare give chase and leave their transport behind."

He had little more than said this when a terrific crash smote them. The lights flickered and snapped out. The craft shook violently from stem to stern. There was an outcry below of frightened voices, then tense silence. Rheydt did not move or speak. A frightened gasp escaped Von Falkenheyn. Elton sat with hands clenched, his teeth sunk into his indrawn lips, his body set tense against a swirling black vortex that seemed to be leaping up out of the darkness. He held himself in check with a supreme effort against the sickening terror of such a death.

The electric lights burned slowly white again and flooded the little hole with light. There was no water pouring in upon them as yet. Rheydt sat staring straight ahead without change of expression, maintaining his perfect self-discipline against the end. Von Falkenheyn had buried his eyes in the crook of his right arm as if to shut out the horror of it all.

"Ship all clear; no water coming in!" rang out a voice below.

Rheydt's face dropped its grim mask. He sat back slowly and breathed deeply. A smile played in his eyes. Von Falkenheyn uncovered his face.

"Missed us—again," said Rheydt. "Well, I thought they had us that time. Too close, that one, for comfort."

Elton shuddered. Von Falkenheyn looked at the commander in anxious inquiry as another detonation, and another, rumbled in the distance.

"This crisis is over," Rheydt added reassuringly. "When they come that close without hitting, the law of averages stands against them thereafter. Never have they struck close a second time—not within my whole experience."

"I thought it was the end, my dear

Korvettankapitan," said Von Falkenheyn, now breathing more easily. "And I can conceive of no more terrible end."

The commander arched his eyes and gave a casual snap of his fingers.

"Death is death, Herr Leutnant," he said lightly. "An unpleasant moment or two, perhaps, and then— But, after all, what a magnificent coffin—steel—and the whole bed of the sea for a crypt. What finer end could one ask, my dear Herr Leutnant?"

The submarine continued its underseas course due ahead for some time, the detonations from depth bombs growing fainter and fainter until their vibration was barely distinguishable aboard. In half an hour Rheydt ordered the tanks blown out, and the craft rose quickly to periscope depth. As the long camouflaged tube lifted its prism eyes above the water, the commander maneuvered the view to the four points of the compass in a painstaking search of the sea.

"They are hopelessly behind," he observed. "All is clear ahead. Soon we will run to the top for air, and a bit of speed from our oil engines."

Except for brief dips just under the surface, the craft held its surface course through the day. As the night deepened, the northern coast of France slipped by and they swept on into the English Channel at a clip of fifteen knots.

If the undersized commander had proved his nerve in the crisis off St. Nazaire, he demonstrated that his slender body was of tempered steel in the long cruise that followed. At times through the night the craft raced on the surface by starlight with an impudent disregard of British naval patrols. Again it would creep along a few meters under the surface. Rheydt did not once leave his post, refusing relief even for meals, and eating with his eyes glued to the periscope. Two long intervals of horror followed for Elton, hours in which the boat lay on the bottom, rocked gently by the roll of the water, the deathlike silence broken from time to time by the uncanny whirring of propellers twenty fathoms above.

Through these eternities Elton contained himself only by exercise of the full force of his will. His brain throbbed from the pressure, his lungs gasped for air, a sticky perspiration oozed from his pores and saturated his clothing. Oxygen, fed into the hammock room from reservoirs, gave no surcease from the choking heaviness of vitiated air freighted with carbonic acid. But there was reassurance in the sonorous snoring of the men as they slept peacefully in their Frankenstein cradle at the bottom of the sea.

"Tomorrow—the Elbe!"

Elton's pulse leaped to the exultant cry from one of the crew. It was the end of the third day out—the third month, it seemed to Elton, through that endless threading of the English Channel, the Straits of Dover; dodging, rising, sinking, zigzagging, rolling nightmares of days and nights! He had been kept below through that eternity, with barely a glimpse of Von Falkenheyn and less of the commander who seemed to bristle each time he caught sight of the American uniform.

There was high excitement now among the crew. The Elbe meant home, a few days' hilarious freedom while the U-boat took on a fresh stock of fuel oil, torpedoes and food supplies before these war buccaneers would fare forth again to sow destruction on the high seas. The craft nosed in close against the black protecting shadows of the coast of Holland and gave its surface engines their heels for the last stage of the long journey.

When he climbed into his hammock at "lights out," there was no thought of sleep in Elton's mind. There was the past to be searched over, the future to be charted. The morrow would find him facing the supreme test. The heavily veiled information, for which France's best secret agents had gambled their lives and lost, would lie within his grasp. He need only keep eyes and ears open to learn the temper of the German masses behind the brawling armies of the Central Empire. Another day might give him the precious answer to the question which was to shape Allied strategy. The question of

whether Germany's war lords were staking their all upon a final desperate lunge at Paris.

But did he not already have the answer to that question? Throughout the unhappy voyage, Elton had been on the alert for any hint of the true identity of Von Falkenheyn. Had those momentous words of the Herr Leutnant to the U-boat commander been something more than rumblings from a junior officers' mess? The almost impudent assurance in which he spoke of the shaggy bear Von Hindenburg and the fox Von Ludendorff, was that mere light chatter or was Von Falkenheyn some titled pet whose hereditary station permitted him to rub elbows with the military masters?

Tomorrow should bring the answer to the question that had haunted him for days—the elusive enigma of Von Falkenheyn's identity. Of his own security ashore, even in enemy uniform, he had small fear. The very audacity of his appearance in olive drab would disarm suspicion, he thought. He went over, step by step, his own movements and actions. They had been logical, natural, without clumsy bungling. And of Von Falkenheyn's gratitude he was sure. That, after all, must provide him with his passports. The mysterious Prussian had shown no inclination to accept the American's services as a matter of course and thrust him aside once they were safe aboard the submarine. Elton's brief turns out on deck had been at Von Falkenheyn's insistence, he remembered. And upon the Prussian's gratitude he had banked his chance.

The sun was scattering a veil of mist from the face of the North Sea when Elton was permitted on deck the next morning. The boat had undergone a transformation. Its masts were hoisted on their hinges and strung with wireless aerials. A lively exchange was being buzzed between the craft and the unseen shore. The stern mast was strung with fluttering pennants—twenty-one of them—one for each ship that had been sent to the bottom during the cruise. The commander was standing beside the conning tower, the crew lined the railing of the long narrow decks beyond.

"We are landing at Cuxhaven, my friend," said Von Falkenheyn as Elton was passing by him.

Elton saw that the Prussian was again steeped in gloomy depression. His chin was sunk upon his breast, his eyes slanted up dully, fixed in the direction of shore.

"It is the irony of fate," Von Falkenheyn reflected bitterly. "The Herr Korvettankapitan arrives in glorious victory to receive the Iron Cross of the first class. Why? Because he has had a chance for it. While I, my friend, go ashore in defeat—another defeat; always a defeat, and to feel the gibes of that shaggy bear and the sly fox!"

A trim, fast launch shot out of the mist and swung gracefully up to the submarine. As it made fast, a young naval officer in gay uniform leaped aboard and stood at salute.

"Come, my friend, I am glad enough to go ashore without waiting to hear the cheers at Kiel," said Von Falkenheyn, leading the way down the iron rungs from the conning tower to the after deck.

The officer from the naval launch, who wore the *aiguillettes* of an aide at his right shoulder, started to address Von Falkenheyn in German.

"The Leutnant Von Falkenheyn reports!" the Prussian cut him off. "With me is an American of our secret service who accompanies me to Berlin."

The aide, ignoring Elton, saluted Von Falkenheyn into the launch, sprang aboard himself and snapped his fingers for the American to follow. Von Falkenheyn, with a parting salute to the crew of the submarine, faced about and set his eyes upon the shore of Germany that now loomed due ahead through a rift in the mist.

"We shall soon be in Berlin where you will be in my care, my friend," the Prussian addressed Elton in a low voice. "Well, now that our journey nears an end, I have a great surprise for you. I am not, after all, the Herr Leutnant Von Falkenheyn

—although that was a name of my own choosing."

Elton looked at him with feigned surprise. It was with an effort that he smothered the breathless suspense in which he awaited the final casting off of the Prussian's mask. Upon Von Falkenheyn's real identity would depend many things, and most of all it would fix the value of his disclosures to Commander Rheydt.

"But I am compelled to say," the Prussian added dejectedly, "that I only wish I were Von Falkenheyn, and not who I really am."

CHAPTER XII

A FORKED TRAIL

HE SAID nothing more as the boat swept to a skilful landing, and Elton clung to the discretion of silence rather than attempt to force the issue. Berlin would bring the answer, and it was only a short run by train up the west bank of the Elbe to the crossing at Hamburg, thence direct into the German metropolis.

Events moved swiftly as the launch touched at a low pier. They were hurried up a ladder to the dock, where they were surrounded immediately by a group of stiff necked German officers. Elton found himself in the care of a German army captain who maneuvered him to one side while Von Falkenheyn was saluted, felicitated and marched off toward a half-dozen large military limousines that awaited the party. His straining ears were able to make out no word of the exchange with Von Falkenheyn, who had cast aside his dejection and chatted gaily with his escort.

In the car with Elton rode only the captain who had taken possession of him. The captain was a strapping fellow with a very square head, very heavy jowls and cold level eyes, who sat as stiff as a ramrod and fingered a bristling mustache affectionately. They followed at the end of the procession, which brought up at the railway station. The moment they were on the platform the captain hustled Elton to an awaiting train and seated him in a second class compartment. No sooner were they seated than the train got under way.

"A special train for the Leutnant Baron Von Falkenheyn?" Elton broke the stiff silence.

"The train merely has been held half an hour to take us aboard," said the captain. "By military orders."

Since his escort showed no inclination at sociability, Elton sat looking out the window as the verdant German countryside swept by. It was only a short run to Hamburg, he remembered, and no doubt Von Falkenheyn would remember his function as host by then. Or at worst he would be caged with this stiff boor no longer than the run to Berlin.

At the end of an hour they flashed through a small village. Elton caught the name on the station—Bremerhaven. Out the window to the right he saw a large broad body of water. The Elbe, he thought. Then he sat bolt upright and narrowed his eyes upon the fleeting green ribbon. The Elbe should be on his left hand—to the north or east running from Cuxhaven to Hamburg. This stream lay on his right, distinctly to the west. He turned to his escort.

"Herr Captain," he exclaimed, "since when did we cross the Elbe that it lies to the right of us?"

"We have not crossed the Elbe, Herr Leutnant," said the officer, to the wall of the compartment.

"But is Hamburg not up the Elbe, with the tracks from Cuxhaven on the west shore of the river?"

"Exactly so; but it is the River Weser you see, Herr Leutnant."

"Weser!" echoed Elton. "But that is not the direction of Berlin."

"It is not to Berlin we travel, Herr Leutnant, as you may see for yourself."

"Von Falkenheyn, then, has changed his destination since we came ashore?"

The officer looked out the window with a stolid expression and suppressed a yawn.

"I know of no one named Von Falkenheyn," he replied. "The man who came ashore with you—he has boarded the Berlin Express. You, Herr Leutnant, are on your way to the city of Köln."

Elton covered his emotions by lighting a cigaret.

"He sent no word to me, Herr Captain?" Elton inquired coolly. "No explanation of this change of our plans? Of the reason why I go to Köln?"

The German officer faced Elton with a sharp turn of his head, without shifting his body.

"Why should he explain?" he snapped. "It is enough that you go to Köln upon the orders of his Excellency the General-Oberst Von Ludendorff. No doubt his Excellency will make any explanations he thinks proper when you present yourself at his headquarters."

In the steady hand that lifted his cigaret, in the collected blowing of a pennant of blue smoke, there was no hint of the surge of despair that swept Elton as he saw himself shunted out of his course. He sat back easily in his seat, his eyes on the window, through which he saw nothing.

But it was not the struggle of a moment to accept this astounding prank. Berlin snatched away as he stood at the portal, the screen of Von Falkenheyn's rescue stripped from him in the very moment he had counted upon it most! Did it mean that the mysterious Prussian had seen through his disguise? Were the fellow's protestations of gratitude nothing more than a ruse? If not, then why had Von Falkenheyn abandoned him with such cold blooded deliberation, without a word of explanation?

Since there was no answer to be found to these questions, Elton shut them from his mind. His habit of discipline finally asserted itself. He remembered that it was not enough that he pretend to be undisturbed. He must reestablish his serenity, an untroubled alertness for whatever adventure lay ahead. Berlin had slipped by. Von Falkenheyn now was a shadow of the past who might or might not have to be reckoned with in the future. His mission alone remained unchanged.

HIS ESCORT paid no attention to him, sitting in that stiff silence of his which seemed to say that he wanted as little as possible to do with the American. Hour after hour, northern Germany slipped past the window of their compartment, a monotonous panorama of hills and swales, thriving fields and sleepy villages. He saw that the fields were worked by women and children, that the people at the stations through which they passed were solemn, even morose. But that information was of little value.

At the end of tedious hours of silence, he turned sharply upon the German in a test of the fellow's plodding wits.

"Would you like to know who my friend, Von Falkenheyn, really is, Herr Captain?"

There was an adroit insinuation in his voice, and the hint of a threat. But the German was not to be trapped into a discussion of Von Falkenheyn's elusive identity. He turned his face to Elton on his pivot of a neck, glared a brief instant and snapped his head to the front without a word.

The train was standing at the time on an isolated siding outside the village of Hamm in the southern part of Westphalia. Despite the uncertain welcome that awaited him at Köln, Elton chafed at the delay as they yielded the right of way to a string of troop trains. It was not until he had been waiting a full half-hour that Elton suddenly awakened to the fact that he looked through the veil of war mad Germany upon a vital drama. For hour after hour the troop trains continued to thunder past. He saw that they were not merely soldiers returning in force from home leave, as he at first thought, but armed troops, accompanied by their *materièl*—light artillery, mortars, tanks, trucks, heavy cannon. That could mean only a shift of combat divisions from one front to another.

To Elton the delay ceased to be op-

pressive. He occupied himself with a careful estimate of the force. Ten light stock cars jammed with men to each train, in addition to the flats sandwiched in with the *materièl*. Forty men to the car meant four hundred men to the train, and with a train at intervals of five minutes for three hours—nearly fifteen thousand men. And Elton remembered that the line through Hamm was only one of a steel network of main rail arteries converging on Köln.

There was eloquent confirmation of a general rail movement from the east in the routing of his own train when it eventually cleared Hamm. Instead of following the troop trains, it was diverted to the southwest by way of Essen, a detour that kept it clear of the main transportation arteries from the east. Evidence enough that Germany was massing in the west for another red offensive—perhaps for the last titanic gamble for Paris itself.

With the lights of Köln at the window, Elton was assailed by a flood of uneasy doubts. Would he step from the train to find himself a military prisoner charged with espionage? He made no effort to hide from himself the dire consequences. The hollow formality of a military court, a convenient stone wall. Or was he being hurried forward for inquisition by the German intelligence staff? That would be a game of wits, with his life as the stake—but one in which he would have at least a precarious chance.

As the train drew into the station, he smiled down a tightening of muscles, a tension of his nerves, and left the compartment complacently. A fat staff officer waddled up, exchanged gutturals with the captain and led the way to a small military auto which whisked them across Köln, entered the grounds of a private estate and drew up at a large stone residence. A soldier opened the door of the car, the fat staff officer led the way into the house and Elton found himself in a large living room that was unencumbered by the headquarters impedimenta he had expected to find.

The staff officer turned to Elton with a sweep of his porcine hand.

"Dis, Herr Leutnant, vill be vare your home iss," he said. "A nice place, mit plenty to eat und trink, *ja*."

He barked at an adjoining room. Two wooden faced soldiers in gray-green field uniform marched in and snapped their heels together.

"Und two goot orderlies we gif you, vot know how to serf a gentlemans," he explained. "Vot you vant for—ask! *Guten abend, Herr Leutnant*."

The two officers immediately left the house. Elton heard the door of their automobile snap shut and the car drive away. At the same time the two soldiers left the room. One of them reappeared in a moment with a polite announcement in broken English that the Herr Leutnant's dinner was served.

As he followed his German orderly into an elegant dining room and ate the excellent dinner that was served, Elton confessed himself completely at sea by the turn of events. His strange reception at Köln did not dismiss the uneasy omens that had grown out of the day. But at least, he assured himself, the Germans would not waste this formality upon him if his identity as an American operative had been definitely established.

CHAPTER XIII

KULTUR

AT ELEVEN o'clock Elton arose from a comfortable chair in the sitting room and stretched himself. A visitation which he awaited with confidence had failed to develop. It must be, he concluded, that there was no haste, after all, in whatever German purpose had brought him to Köln. Another hopeful indication. But he was no sooner in his bedroom than he heard an automobile arrive. He smiled grimly as the door opened and closed and he heard a gruff demand for the Herr Leutnant. So he had merely underestimated the time of the visit.

"Be seated, Lieutenant, please."

The voice greeted him the instant he reappeared in the sitting room. It was a low voice, but vibrant with authority. Elton saw a middle aged man with a fat, very red face out of which a pair of penetrating blue eyes stared at him coldly.

"I am the Leutnant-Oberst Heinrich von Niederbrohm," the German announced. "I have questions to ask you, which you will please answer as I ask them."

It was a personality he reckoned with now, Elton perceived. He acknowledged the German's terse greeting with a curt bow and sat down. The officer had a certain professional assurance that seemed to say he knew what he wanted and had no doubt of his ability to get it.

"State your name in full, please."

Von Niederbrohm began the interview while a bespectacled *Feldwebel* who was to reduce it to record scrambled to get pad and pencil into action.

"Erich Paul Steuben," replied Elton in a casual, unhurried voice.

"Your age, date and place of birth are?"

"Twenty-six years. Born June 12, 1893, at Brandebourg, Germany."

"Name in full of your father and mother?"

"August Heinrichs Steuben and Gretchen Pirna Steuben."

"The date at which you moved to America, and the circumstances?"

There was no hesitation in Elton's answers. He had prepared long since for just such an emergency as this. But he found it disconcerting that the German continued to inquire only about himself. For an hour these questions continued, always of Steuben's movements after leaving Germany. Simple, direct questions. Never a word of military operations.

During the whole interview Von Niederbrohm sat with his frozen eyes fixed upon Elton's face. He spoke in a dull monotone, with a never changing expression of face. Elton, equally the master of himself, betrayed no evidence of discomfort, of the growing uneasiness at the nature of the inquisition.

"That will be all, Lieutenant," the German finally announced.

"Thank you, Herr Oberst," smiled Elton. "I am not to be questioned then on —on military matters, I take it?"

"That is so unnecessary, Lieutenant," Von Niederbrohm replied without change of voice or expression. "What I have asked you is more to the point."

"I don't follow you, Herr Oberst."

"My official duty is ended, Lieutenant —I assume I address you with your proper rank. If it would interest you I will be glad to give you my unofficial views."

"Why, certainly, Herr Oberst, if it pleases you."

Von Niederbrohm dropped his relentless eyes, fumbled in his uniform for a cigar, lighted it and resumed his stare.

"My personal belief is that you are an American spy—rather a clever one in some respects, but hardly clever enough—as you now perceive," he said without emotion.

Elton met his eyes squarely.

"American operatives, Herr Oberst, identify themselves by entering your secret service and releasing one of your valuable officers from a French prison?" said Elton. "Is that your reasoning?"

"Precisely, Lieutenant!"

"Just what do you mean, Herr Oberst?"

"What an excellent means of getting into our lines, thinking we would be completely misled, and you would get to see what is going on."

The eyes of neither yielded. Their faces were placid masks.

"You forget that your own secret service sent me to rescue Von Falkenheyn, Herr Oberst. It was not my plan."

"Another evidence of the resourcefulness of our own secret service, Lieutenant. The Hauptmann Eggiwil knew precisely what he was about when he sent you to Vincennes. I might say that he identified your probable mission the moment you appeared in Basel, and cleverly turned you to his own purposes, knowing the French would have brains enough to con-

nive at letting Von Falkenheyn escape."

Elton held his poise with an effort at this thrust.

"Herr Eggiwil may possibly mistake his own disagreeable suspicions for fact," said Elton tartly. "Am I to understand, then, Herr Oberst, that I am to be rewarded by such suspicions for my rescue of Von Falkenheyn? Is that the German view of gratitude, Herr Oberst?"

Von Niederbrohm arched his brows very slightly, a mild annoyance.

"Gratitude is a weakness rather than a virtue," he replied. "Our great Nietzsche would term a fool the man who would be moved from his logical course by such a weakness. We must remember that Germany's necessity is the dominant law of conduct now. We must know no other law. That law demands that we take no risk of revealing to the enemies of destiny our military plans for the immediate future. So, if you have depended on the gratitude of Von Falkenheyn, you have been very foolish, Lieutenant."

The German said this in the manner of a professor who propounds some abstract principle. It came to Elton suddenly that he dealt not merely with a Prussian militarist but an exponent of Prussian military *Kultur*, a man who had shut sentiment from his life, whose every thought was fixed by the belief that a superior Germany must dominate the world at any cost.

"It is not clear to me, Herr Oberst," Elton persisted, "just why you should regard me as a menace since I have put myself completely at the German mercy by coming here."

"I have weighed that very carefully, Lieutenant. You see, your case was placed in my hands even before you left Vincennes. Your appearance here only confirmed my expectations. I have reasoned very logically, too, that a man of your cleverness no doubt has tapped the brain of Von Falkenheyn—that you know far too much of our necessity for taking Paris."

"Do you trust your lieutenants—your secret agents such as Von Falkenheyn, with the secrets of your strategy, Herr Oberst?" Elton bantered. "Assuming the correctness of your theories of my identity, what could I hope to learn from one of your junior officers?"

"One thing is quite probable, I'll admit, Lieutenant—that you do not know who Von Falkenheyn is. A dangerous man to the army running at large. If I were at liberty to disclose his identity you would understand."

"Yet your army sent him to France as a secret agent, Herr Oberst. Your statements are not consistent."

"Much to the contrary, it was his own impulsive impudence that sent him to France."

Oberst Von Niederbrohm's brows arched again, his one expression of emotion. He puffed reflectively at his cigar as if weighing his words very carefully before he added—

"I am not certain that his release from Vincennes was for the best interests of Germany, a thought that is shared by my immediate military superiors."

"Then, Herr Oberst, why was I authorized to spend five million marks, if necessary?" Elton demanded. "Why was I told that there was no greater service I could perform for Germany than effect Von Falkenheyn's release?"

"Sentiment, Lieutenant. A mere extravagant sentiment fostered by the sentimental Eggiwil, and a natural one as you would admit if you knew the circumstances. But nevertheless a dangerous weakness, one which the minds that guide Germany through our present crisis were helpless to circumvent. And except for our prompt action in intercepting you, we might have to pay a terrible price."

"What am I to understand by that, Herr Oberst?"

"Simply this: that if we had not contacted you at Coxhaven, you might have contrived to get back to your own lines with the invaluable information I am convinced you possess—the information Von Falkenheyn prattled in the presence of the Commander Rheydt. Ah, you see, Lieutenant, our thoroughness has left no

stone unturned. We know how well you understand Germany's present necessity; and what wouldn't your generalissimo give to know that we stake all when we drive for Paris?"

As Von Niederbrohm said this, Elton was struck by a mad impulse to resort to force. He remembered that he had not been disarmed—that he might easily cover the Prussian officer, seize his car and make a dash for the frontier. But he thrust back that desperate impulse and coolly lighted a cigaret.

"Since your suspicions are so definite, and your confidence in yourself so complete," he said dryly, "I suppose the formality of my trial for espionage is a settled fact, Herr Oberst?"

"On the other hand, Lieutenant, you will not be placed under arrest at present—for reasons that I will not comment upon. You will remain here in comfort, until I have completed a case against you that will leave no room for doubt. That, in my opinion, will be a very simple matter."

"But if there is no evidence, Herr Oberst?"

"But I suspect there will be ample evidence, Lieutenant. Before morning our secret agents in America, our intelligence in Brandebourg, and the resources of the German secret service will be at work on the details of the statement you have given me tonight of your life."

The German stood up, reached for his cap and snapped his stubby fingers at the *Feldwebel.*

"I am frank to say," he added, "that if my counsel could prevail, I would waste no such effort on you. It will only confirm what I already know. But—it will all come out the same way in the end. Good evening, Lieutenant."

CHAPTER XIV

A FAMILIAR FACE

AS HE heard the Herr Leutnant-Oberst Von Niederbrohm's car roll away, Elton calmly dismissed his wooden faced orderly and went upstairs with carefree step. But he knew now that it was a game of wits he faced, a game in which he held the losing hand. German thoroughness would run down every thread of his improvised story.

Why they did not arrest him immediately, why they allowed him to remain a guest at this luxurious estate, why they took no apparent measures to prevent his escape—those things were a mystery. But the German intention was no longer veiled. It would be only a matter of time until Von Niederbrohm would complete his relentless work. Then, the court and inevitable firing squad . . .

One course and one only remained to him. His jaw set as the decision crystallized in his mind. Escape offered him his one chance. And it was not merely a matter of his life, now. Von Niederbrohm, with all his monumental ego, had talked too freely. Elton now knew without question that the Kaiser's high command staked their all in the pending drive on Paris. If they failed—*Kultur* would go into the world's swill barrel!

After breakfast hour, Elton ventured out in the gardens that surrounded the fine old house. It puzzled him that he was allowed the freedom of the five acres of trees, shrubs and lawns. No one accompanied him as he strolled leisurely about. The two orderlies remained at the house. He wondered, too, that his pistol had not been taken from him, nor any search made of his person. The treatment accorded him certainly was out of all accord with Von Niederbrohm's frank charges.

He had decided against any hasty bolt across the frontier. He would proceed carefully, laying his plans with the utmost care. There was time for caution, he assured himself. Von Niederbrohm's work would require perhaps a fortnight. In the meantime he would pretend to be wholly unconcerned by the Prussian's quest and leave them holding the bag when opportunity favored his effort.

Two days later his plan had matured. A simple, direct plan that offered some prospect of success. During the night he would exchange uniforms with one of his

orderlies under the persuasion of his Army automatic, bind the fellow, creep out through the rear of the grounds and make his way by street car into the heart of the city. Thence he would proceed by taxi-cab across the Rhine, commandeer the auto to carry him through the frontier region and worm his way through the lines. If the trail grew too hot, he would abandon the auto, hide out by day and travel at night with the German supply columns that were certain to jam every road leading toward the Front. Two days, three at most, he told himself, should see him at the end of the route, Köln—Trier—Metz—Nancy, while the German pursuit concentrated its logical efforts along the short route between Köln and the frontier of Holland.

His plan now completed, Elton was debating a restless demand within himself for action that night, when a car drove up. His first visitor since the disconcerting Von Niederbrohm. As his orderly answered the door, Elton pretended sleep.

A woman's voice greeted him, in French.

"Monsieur was not expecting me again," she said gaily. "But I hope I will not find myself an unwelcome visitor."

It was the voice of Mlle. Thiezac. Elton arose, instantly alert, and smiled a friendly greeting. So the Hauptmann Eggiwil had sent his female operative up to question him . . .

"It is a great pleasure to see you again, mademoiselle," he exclaimed. "Please be seated; and since it is very lonesome here, let me hope that you will remain for dinner."

"I stay but a short time, monsieur," she said. "Will you be good enough to dismiss your servant? I wish to speak with you—alone."

Elton placed a chair for the woman and closed the doors upon his servants.

"Will you please be very frank with me, monsieur?" said Mlle. Thiezac bruskly. "Are you really an American secret operative? First, let me assure you that I will not repeat what you say to me."

"An unusual question, mademoiselle." Elton laughed. "First, may I ask if you have not told me before that you are a German secret operative?"

"Yes, I do not deny that, monsieur," Mlle. Thiezac put in quickly. "But not of the secret police—not of the military intelligence. May I tell you in confidence?"

"It is for you to judge, mademoiselle, how far you should trust me."

She lowered her voice to a whisper.

"I am of the secret service of the Imperial Household," she said. "My orders are from his Imperial Majesty, the Emperor."

"Who would hardly interest himself in an ordinary military agent such as I now find myself accused of being," Elton responded. He added with bitterness, "I presume you have been sent here by the grateful Von Falkenheyn to see what you can learn."

"I have been sent here to help you—if you will let me, monsieur," she whispered. "Von Falkenheyn has not forgotten; it was his plea that brought me to Köln."

Elton laughed ironically. He had no doubt of Mlle. Thiezac's real mission and he was determined to meet her efforts with a subtle raillery.

"If Von Falkenheyn had that power, mademoiselle," he said, "he hardly would have deserted me at Cuxhaven as soon as he was safely ashore."

"There is much you do not understand, monsieur," she protested. "Not even his Imperial Majesty would have risked interference."

"Do you ask me to believe, mademoiselle, that Wilhelm is no longer Emperor of Germany, King of Prussia, and commander in chief of the armies and navy? Do you expect me to believe he can not give orders affecting a mere lieutenant?"

"Not in the present crisis, monsieur. The destines of Germany are in the hands of two men whom I must not name. Let them pass by the name of the shaggy bear and the crafty fox. They demand that there be no interference from the Crown for the present, monsieur—and his majesty has given his solemn word."

Mlle. Thiezac's earnestness caught Elton, her use of the same queer terms which Von Falkenheyn had given to the mailed fist and the crafty brain of the German war Frankenstein—Von Hindenburg and Von Ludendorff.

"If you are an American operative they will find it out, monsieur," she warned him. "They will leave no stone unturned to get their evidence—if there is evidence to be had, monsieur?"

Elton smiled at her quizzically. Her voice had shaped her final words into a question and her eyes were searching his face.

"But suppose—just for argument—there is evidence, mademoiselle. Does Von Falkenheyn wish the glory of finding it first, from my own lips?"

"It is enough for his Excellency the Baron Von Falkenheyn that you saved his life at great risk of your own, monsieur. The motive would not change him. Oh, if you but knew his generous nature! An overgrown, impulsive boy, his adventure with you the one really great event of his unhappy life. He will never forget you, monsieur, never!"

"You have not said what it is you propose, mademoiselle?" Elton asked this guardedly. "Of course, you must not expect me to confess that I am a secret operative of the American Army."

"I have reached my own conclusion as to that," she said pointedly. "But let me warn you against any effort to escape, monsieur."

"Just why do you think that I might try to escape?"

"It has been made to appear so—so simple for you," she whispered. "But the place is closely guarded outside the grounds. You would be shot the moment you appeared outside. It is what they expect to happen."

Her warning shook him with the force of a blow as he saw his one hope swept away. He did not question what she said; its truth was all too evident now.

"One other warning, monsieur. Beware, if you should later be taken to the Front under pretext of giving information. Do not attempt to escape there, for it will be intended that you do not leave the Front alive."

He forced a whimsical smile to his face.

"It would seem to be rather all up with me, mademoiselle. If I stay here, I am sure to be tried and shot. If I leave, I am to be shot without trial."

Mlle. Thiezac arose and extended her hand.

"I have warned you, monsieur. Please remember what I have told you. That will give us time—until I am back in Berlin with my report of you."

"I will do as you say, mademoiselle. But you leave me in the dark as to why, if they wish so very much to shoot me, they do not do so at once."

"I will tell you this much!" Her eyes blazed and there was a note of defiance in her voice. "It is one thing to deceive the house of Hohenzollern, as they intend to do by getting you to attempt escape. It is another thing to incur the Imperial displeasure by trying you without evidence, which they don't dare do! *Adieu, monsieur*, and don't lose hope—no matter what may threaten you."

CHAPTER XV

A HOUSE AT THE FRONT

IF MLLE. THIEZAC left Elton with any doubt of the dangers of escape, they were dispelled an hour later when he went to the edge of the grounds. From behind a protecting hedge at the most remote part of the place, he searched the area outside only to detect half a dozen clumsily camouflaged sentry positions, from at least one of which the muzzle of a Mauser was to be seen. An attempt to creep past the cordon, even after dark, would be sheer suicide, he quickly saw.

But he did not abandon his decision to escape. Even though mysterious influences might actually be at work in his behalf, he reminded himself that something far greater than his own life was at stake. Better to gamble with death in a last desperate trial for success of his mis-

sion, than hold back weakly before the threat of dangers. Even if Von Falkenheyn's influence at court saved him from a firing squad, he told himself, it would not save him from internment for the duration of the war.

Elton wasted but little thought upon the conflicting tangle of speculation that Mlle. Thiezac's visit presented. Whether Mlle. Thiezac was what she pretended to be or merely baited him with some deft new trap of the German secret service was of little moment compared with the staggering necessity he faced—that of getting back through the lines before the German army made its last red gamble for Paris.

Out of the night a new plan formed. A desperate plan this time—yet the only one that offered hope. When another Prussian officer came, he would meet him with the muzzle of a pistol, commandeer his car and force the officer to escort him south through Coblenz and Trier to Metz, then through the lines in front of Pont-à-Mousson.

The fact that he must wait upon opportunity fretted Elton far more than the precarious danger of the plan. He groaned at the thought that a week might pass, or two weeks, before another official visit. Perhaps not until the Herr Leutnant-Oberst Von Niederbrohm was ready with his confirmed charges.

The day that followed was endless. Elton walked about the house fighting a fever of impatience at this wracking inaction. Not even when he lay stifling in a submarine at the bottom of the sea had an hour seemed such an eternity. Not until midnight did he abandon hope and retire for a few hours of restless sleep.

He was up again before daybreak, taking no risk that opportunity find him unprepared. His restlessness grew, his ears constantly straining at every sound, the while he pretended to be wholly at ease and contented. He began to wonder if he would be able to stand the rising tension, this empty waiting on opportunity when every hour might be priceless. His mind turned again to the possibility of threading the German hornet nest outside the grounds. He thought of making another reconnoissance, yet he did not dare leave the house. His chance might come while his back was turned.

A glance at his watch brought a moan. He thought the hour must be well past noon. It was short of nine o'clock. Then he was brought to his feet by a sound. He checked himself in the thought that his ears might be playing him a prank. But the wheels of an approaching automobile were not to be mistaken.

"You will prepare tea for my guests; I will let you know when we are ready to have it served."

He gave the order coolly to his flunkeys, closed the door upon them and hurried across the room. As the car rolled toward the house, he stepped forward, every faculty alert, ready to cover whatever visitor appeared. He had planned that there would be no lost motion. He would shoot if necessary, seize the car and be on his way in a twinkling.

But his desperation had not stripped him of his reason. As the car rolled to a stop beside him he instantly saw his utter helplessness. It was neither Von Niederbrohm, nor his escort from Coxhaven. A tall, lantern jawed German officer stepped out; with him were two other officers. On the driver's seat of the car sat a German infantryman with Mauser barrel gripped in his hands. The three officers wore sidearms. He knew that a short and one sided duel would follow should he attempt force. Men of the fighting line were hardly to be intimidated by a solitary pistol behind their own Front.

"Herr Leutnant," the tall officer spoke up at once, "you will prepare to leave with us immediately."

Elton turned into the house with a muttered acceptance. The passion of the past minute had left him momentarily weak and unstrung. He wondered only vaguely what was now afoot as he reclaimed the musette bag which he had left behind and presented himself at the car.

The tall German placed him in the rear seat between two junior officers. No word was spoken as they sped through Köln, past the great cathedral and westward across the river. As the car turned into the main artery toward Aix la Chapelle, Elton's growing suspicions were confirmed. He was being taken to the Front. He remembered Mlle. Thiezac's warning. But it had lost its power to disturb him. Life was only a gamble now—in which the cards ran against him. A taut smile fixed itself on his face.

From Aix la Chapelle the car continued on the highway south and west to Namur. Hour after hour they sped on, circling supply trains, dodging troop columns. At noon the German iron ration was passed around, another token of a long journey. The grim silence continued. The Germans might have been mere dummies, except that occasionally they smoked. At Namur, they turned more sharply to the southwest. Road congestion began to hamper them as night approached, endless columns of troops and supplies plodding toward the red hopper of impending battle. With darkness they were slowed to a snail's pace. Then at ten o'clock they turned off the main road and shortly came to a halt.

"Here is where we leave the car," said the tall officer, a lieutenant.

It was the first word he had spoken since leaving Köln. Without giving further information he led Elton through the dark streets of what appeared to be a primitive French farm village to an unlighted house, pushed open the door and lighted a candle.

"*Guten abend, Herr Leutnant,*" said the uncommunicative German officer, turning back unceremoniously into the night.

A primitive stone French habitation was disclosed by the candle. It was furnished with a board table, a few rough chairs and a bed. There were two folded German army blankets on the bed and several issues of iron ration. Elton guessed that the town must be the headquarters of a German regiment. Its proximity to the lines had been revealed by the signs he had seen before dark, "*Nach Rheims*".

Elton made no effort to fathom his immediate situation. Mlle. Thiezac's dire warning was fresh in his mind, but until the German hand showed itself he quickly decided that he would stay where he had been put, in this dismal stone rookery. Midnight passed without development. He listened carefully for sound of sentries outside his door. Occasionally there were footsteps, soldiers passing by, but no hint of prowlers. He heard heavy traffic in the distance, a monotonous rumble like the roar of breakers.

He awakened to the light in his eyes and the pounding of feet outside. Soldiers were passing in groups now, although not in formation. Clerks and orderlies going to their daily headquarters grind, he concluded. As the morning wore on he ate a part of the iron rations. Noon passed. Evening crept on. There was no summons. From the single window in the room he saw that the village ended only a dozen meters to the west. A narrow road, flanked by trees and screened by camouflage, told him the direction of the Front. For supper he helped himself to more of the German iron ration.

Another empty night passed. The day that followed was broken only by the visit of a German soldier who replenished the supply of food. The strain was beginning to unseat his nerves. There was no doubt that the stage was set for a brash escape. But he felt a growing urge to disregard their trap, to attempt escape by excavating under the house and through the rear. Thereafter he would have to meet obstacles as they arose; but might not he have a fighting chance of getting through?

He was pacing the floor fighting this impulse out with himself as midnight approached, when the door was thrown open and a German officer stepped in. Elton's unsettled nerves tricked him into a sharp exclamation. The officer was Herr Hauptmann Eggiwil, German secret police.

CHAPTER XVI

FRIEDENSTURM

AS THE German turned to close the door, Elton felt himself bristle. A grim thought flashed into his mind. Eggiwil had come to gloat upon him. Well, Eggiwil might never pass out through that door he had just closed!

"I am glad you vas not yet run away, Herr Leutnant," Eggiwil announced airily.

He drew a chair up to the table and sat down, his inscrutable eyes searching Elton's face. Elton looked back at him with an undisguised contempt.

"Just why should I think of running away, Herr Hauptmann?" he inquired.

"Because, Herr Leutnant, you iss of der American intelligence staff—iss it not?" he asked with his boring directness.

"Your favorite suspicion, Herr Hauptmann. But I gather you are a man of many suspicions."

"But we talk our minds, Herr Leutnant. Dis iss no times for nonsense. You know vy you iss here? No? You iss here so dot ven you escape—you don't escape. A shot—*poof!* Und dead men told no tales, Herr Leutnant."

"And since I have not tried to escape, I assume it is your pleasant duty to force me into it, Herr Hauptmann?"

"*Ja, Herr Leutnant.* Exactly! But first I makes der bargain. If you escape, und also I escape, your vord of honor as a officer dot I am vot you call interned, treated like a gentleman und—und gif der fifty thousand marks?"

Elton laughed aloud at the fellow's clumsy pretext.

"But what gives you the idea that I want to escape, Herr Hauptmann? Do you always accept your own stupid suspicions as fact?"

"Enough nonsenses, Herr Leutnant! If you don't escape—vun mark iss too much a price for your life. Do I haf your vord?"

While the German spoke, Elton's mind leaped to a sudden decision. It was no more desperate than any plan that might offer now. He would go with Eggiwil—but over a route which his own pistol would dictate.

"Very well, Herr Hauptmann," he announced tensely. "You have my word then. Twice fifty thousand marks, if you say so. Lead out and I'll follow!"

Eggiwil strode to the door, passed outside and returned with a German cap and tunic. Elton got into them gingerly. Unimpeachable evidence of an attempt to escape! Another reminder of German attention to detail.

"Und now, Herr Leutnant, follow close," the officer instructed. "March right out und keep steps, und I vill do all der speaking mit der sentinels."

Taking his position on Eggiwil's left, Elton kept close at the German's side—too close for the most expert marksman to risk a shot. He drew his own pistol, into the barrel of which he already had eased a cartridge from the magazine, and held it ready for use. As they left the cluster of houses and proceeded down the tree lined road, he thrust the muzzle of his weapon against Eggiwil's side.

"A misstep, Herr Hauptmann, and I will pull the trigger," he threatened.

"*Ei, Gott!*" snorted Eggiwil. "Der ground is rough—und do be careful of der triggers."

They marched on at a sharp pace. Sentries challenged from time to time as they passed along communicating trenches from one fighting trench to another. Eggiwil responded to the vigil with one magic word, "*Friedensturm!*" It passed them forward without further question. As they came finally to the outpost position, an officer searched their faces with a flashlight, only to click his heels loudly and salute them on their way.

When they came to the wire and Eggiwil ordered an outpost officer to pilot them through into No Man's Land, Elton was challenging the evidence of his own senses. Despite Eggiwil's easy response to the muzzle of the pistol, every nerve in Elton's body had been straining against a sudden trick. It was not until they had left the wire behind and Eggi-

wil was plunging ahead into No Man's Land almost at a trot that he suspected the German had been in deadly earnest. A traitor, then! Did the shrewd rascal foresee the end—and drive a desperate bargain against the Prussian collapse?

"Und now, Herr Leutnant," whispered Eggiwil, coming to an abrupt halt, "now it iss der French lead. A hundert meters, und ve iss at der French vires. Easy, Herr Leutnant; der French iss jumpy und shoot at shadows."

Elton had replaced his pistol. He knew now that Eggiwil laid no trap for him. But it struck him as incredible that the German would go through with his nefarious bargain.

"Are you not going back, Herr Hauptmann, while you have a chance?" he asked.

"*Ach, Gott!*" said Eggiwil in a hoarse whisper. "A fine welcome behind, *ja*. Not efen his Majesty vould forgif. Und I haf your word of honor, Herr Leutnant—der honor of der Amerikan staff."

AN HOUR at French division headquarters, until Colonel Rand himself could be brought out of his sleep to the telephone. The French were sharply incredulous. Two men appearing in German uniforms before their wires—one of them claiming to be an American officer with priceless information. Another German trick perhaps.

Colonel Rand's voice became excited as he identified Elton's voice over the wire. He demanded that the French division commander himself, no one less, be awakened immediately and put on the line. The French general quickened into animation as he talked with American headquarters. He turned from the telephone and ordered his own car, his own driver. *Tout de suite!* The Capitaine Elton must be driven instantly to Chaumont—at high speed—at any cost—yes, even at the cost of the general's own car!

The car whirred through the French countryside. Past Châlons. Into Troyes as the sun was pushing its red advance guard far out across the horizon. Elton sat leaning tensely forward, his eyes fixed upon the road as it rushed up at the snail's pace of a mile each minute. The *caserne* would loom up presently—in another two hours. And he had pulled his mission through—miraculously.

He paid no attention to the Herr Hauptmann Eggiwil. Elton understood now the contempt in which his escort had held him on that trip from Cuxhaven. A traitor! He found himself loathing the wretch. Eggiwil's shrewd mind must have sensed the inevitable end, so he had jumped to cover—for a cash consideration. Elton remembered that when he stepped ashore in Germany it was upon Von Falkenheyn's gratitude that he had staked his dependence. A misguided gratitude, perhaps. And yet he reminded himself that he had taken a fair risk to save the mysterious Prussian from a French firing squad. He smiled cynically at the thought that it was treason, not gratitude, that had seen him through his final crisis.

The auto was halted by an iron gate across the railway tracks at Troyes while a French troop train passed toward Paris. Herr Hauptmann Eggiwil roused himself to air the misery in which he had been steeped since leaving French division headquarters.

"*Ei, Gott,*" he moaned, "a fine end to my career, Herr Leutnant!"

"You are probably better off as it is," said Elton. "Don't fear but that my word will be made good, Herr Hauptmann—including the fifty thousand marks."

The German snapped erect in his seat. He fairly barked at Elton.

"Not for fifty billion marks, gold, haf I done vot I haf done, Herr Leutnant!"

"A touch of conscience, Herr Hauptmann?" Elton inquired dryly.

"*Ach*, a lot of foolishness, Herr Leutnant." Eggiwil was whimpering again. "For a whim I sacrifice meinself, a vish from dot impulsive boy—a command vot I should haf report to der Emperor, maybe. But no, Herr Leutnant! Seven generations of Eggiwils we haf serve der

Household—ten Eggiwils haf died like a gentlemen. It should be I haf no regrets."

"You do not make yourself very clear, Herr Hauptmann."

"Ven I tell you dot it vas my beloved Joachim you haf bring back to Germany—und it vas his wish you be returned to France. Not even der war, Herr Leutnant, kills der fine instincts of a Prussian gentlemen."

There was a pathos in Eggiwil's ponderous red face as he said this, a mellowing of his stern eyes. Elton saw with puzzling eyes the unbelievable transformation.

"You mean—the fellow Von Falkenheyn?" he demanded.

"*Herr Gott*, vot a funny name der unhappy boy takes for himself. But I vill tell you now der name, Herr Leutnant—der name dot for ten generations is der law of Eggiwil. Der man I teach to ride, und hunt und to shoot und gif orders. Vell, his vish is all der orders I need, Herr Leutnant—und here I am!"

Eggiwil drew himself up and thrust his red face close to Elton. He pounded his chest with his closed hand and barked his words.

"Und now, Herr Leutnant, der bill is paid. His Royal Highness—Prince Joachim of der Imperial House of Hohenzollern owes you nothings; nothings vot we haf not paid back in full—Herr Leutnant!"

The CAMP-FIRE

A free-to-all meeting place for readers, writers and adventurers

A COMRADE who served with the Twenty-Seventh Infantry in Siberia has a few words to say about the Cossack chief, Kalmikoff, who appeared as one of the characters in Malcolm Wheeler-Nicholson's story, "The Song of Death."

Chicago Heights, Ill.

In a recent issue you included another tale by Malcolm Wheeler-Nicholson, and he refers to Ataman Kalmikoff, whom we who were exiled over there by Mr. Wilson facetiously referred to as At-a-Boy Killem-off for his playful habit of bumping off all and sundry who had a few rubles, under the charge that they were Bolsheviks.

One of the Flying Fish "Oblaw Birds," i.e., interpreters, told me that he collected a thousand scalps in the town of Khabavrosk in September and October of 1918; and I have a picture of about a dozen poor stiffs that he had dragged out of the local Bastille one Sunday and had butchered just to show folks that he was so cockeyed tough that he could kill people on Sunday just as well as any other day of the week.

I see before me yet the entrance to the American headquarters crowded with women asking the intercession of the American forces to save their men folks from the bloody "cheese knives" of the Cossacks, for it was not always a merciful bullet that ended all over there. And you can rest assured that the slaughter was ended, and that this would-be Napoleon of Siberia himself almost lost his life due to the mutiny of his troops when he no longer was able to feed and clothe them in brigand style.

I have his picture posing with his staff with his

hand thrust into his coat aping the "Little Corporal," and it was with joy that I read later on after we were permitted to return to the States that he was slaughtered like a dog in trying to make his "getaway" when no longer under the protection of the Jap army.

It brings up that bitter cold day in January when upon arising we found that some three hundred of his men came down to our camp about two A.M., dragging with them all their equipment after their failure to kill this so-called "White Army" leader. It brings up, too, how the "Bull of the Woods" refused to surrender them to the Japs for return to Kalmikoff, then how we had to post heavy guards from dusk to dawn in sub-zero weather to prevent reprisals.

The Cossack officials charged that the American officers fomented the mutiny, that it was our interference that made it impossible to feed, clothe, and pay the Cossacks that winter.

It was the Cossacks' conduct that cut Kolchek's throat; their policy of rapine and slaughter that is to blame for the red flag in Siberia.

I know that these stories of Wheeler-Nicholson are fiction founded on some fact, but with my remembrance of the action of the Cossack Atamans in Siberia I want to give to you and perhaps to the readers another picture than that formerly painted.

I wish that I were able to pound out for you a story of what I saw over there, as little as it was (for I was only a rear rank private) and trim it up for your table so as to give as I said before another picture from another angle; that of those who went over expecting to aid in the big war and were left there neglected to wait and wait and wait, with no one to tell us what was expected, why we were there or when we were going to go home.

I got home early Oct. 28, '19. Some of the local boys came home Jan. '20. Well that is ten years ago!
—A. J. KLATZMEYER, formerly with Co. H, 27th U. S. Inf.

WHEN Mr. W. A. Posey arose at Camp-Fire not so long ago to give a little dissertation on snakes, you will recall he closed with a blanket challenge to the experts who scoff at the belief in the existence of several varieties apparently not included in any scientific category of *Reptilia*. Not only did he stand four-square on the integrity of the moot hoop-snakes, but he offered to show any of these Doubting Thomases something of even greater improbability—a snake with *feet*. The only condition of importance, if I remember aright, was that said experts "trail along with me until we find a suitable subject." Which might lead those of us who are more skeptical than others to think that Mr. Posey was merely trying (and succeeding) to give us a good time.

At any rate, he did not get many bites from our snake authorities. But from a woman reader in the Philippines comes the appended letter. It is clearly evident that she is a pretty fair expert on queer animals herself:

Manila, P. I.

I am going to step into the firelight for just a moment even if I am just a woman. And I am going to talk about snakes. Page Adam!

If the Mr. Posey who writes about snakes is the same Mr. Posey I know, then if he says snakes grow in instalments then they do grow that way and he has seen 'em. As a telegraph operator at Chattanooga, Tennessee, a Mr. Posey was manager and was later transferred to a better office at Atlanta, and your Mr. Posey writes from there. And that Mr. Posey sure does not say what he does not know is really true. Being manager of a telegraph office makes 'em that way.

About snakes with wings. I see 'em every day. Sure the P. I. is a wet country, but I don't mean that kind of snakes. In my back yard I keep chickens—sometimes—when the snakes don't beat me to it. The chickens were making a row and I investigated. There was a snake, bright vivid green blending down to light green near his belly, with gold colored scales down his back. About twenty-four inches long. His head was the same diameter as his body which was perfectly round right down to the tip of the tapering tail. Perfectly smooth, with such small scales he looked like a piece of bright green and gold metal. While I watched he darted out his head and snapped at a baby chicken! Two big gulps and the chicken was gone feathers and all.

That was too much for me so I stepped into the chicken yard. Snake seemed to twitch and there were four inadequate tiny legs with feet like toothpicks propping up a sausage. I was mad and picked up a rock and threw it. Being a woman, I missed and the snake calmly unfolded two huge transparent wings from along his sides and flew up into a tree. I made a cage with a swinging door and baited it with an egg and a baby chicken and next morning there was a snake but no egg and no chicken.

When my houseboy saw what I had caught he turned the same color as the snake and ran. I drowned it by dropping the cage in a pail of water.

The natives say they are poisonous. They call them monocabok. I catch about four or five a week and right now the score is 63-18 in favor of the snakes, as they eat several chickens before they go after the one in the cage.

They have long sharp teeth which, even after the snake is dead, when pushed into a comparatively new cat with all nine lives intact, will relieve said

cat of all nine lives in as many minutes. So they are evidently poisonous. Now in *this* snake story I have the snake. If any one wants a sample and can tell me how to deodorize it so it can be mailed and who has a good gas mask when he unpacks it I will be glad to send one on. The houseboys tell me that vegetables grown in the soil where these snakes are buried will kill a man in a few minutes. So I have a burial ground surrounded by a small wire fence.

I have been reading *Adventure* since 1912 and have an identification card of metal and would like to get one for my son who is growing up now. We all travel continually and I feel safer when we have one. Do you still issue them? I hope this will show some of the doubters that there are still queer animals in this world and glad to send any one who does not believe it a sample. —E. C. DU BARRY

IF YOU'VE already read "The Master of the Conjurers' Guild" in this issue, you will not have failed to be struck by its sprightly Continental flavor. It is quite unaffected, too, as is borne out by the author's introduction of himself to the Camp-Fire, on the occasion of his first appearance in our pages.

It's a nice and cosy feeling to fry one's bacon at the Camp-Fire and I am ever so grateful to the editor for the chance.

Speaking of my writings, I always happen to have an excuse at hand: I just say that if a man writes in five languages he has the privilege of not being an expert in any of them. Of course, I use this excuse because it contains a hidden boast, as you have probably noticed by now. At any rate all writers are vain and I am five of them.

Fifteen years of my adult life were spent in newspaper work in the Balkans, in Hungary, Austria, Germany, France and England. I started out as a police reporter and ended the fifteen years as special writer on the staff of the London *Morning Post* during the war. Towards the end of the war I was interned as a dangerous enemy alien for taking the part of Hungary, my native country, against the Chechoslovaks in some of my articles. The British Government favored the Chechs. So I continued writing from the camp. In between I wrote several novels and plays (one of them is awaiting production at the hands of Mr. Al Woods of New York, if we both live long enough), have translated several of Molnar's plays, hundreds of his short stories and one of his novels into English, also a volume of poems by Rudyard Kipling, and Edgar Allan Poe into Hungarian for parity's sake.

Kipling wrote me a nice letter, Molnar never as much as sent a postcard. Apart from this I prefer Kipling. So I decided to translate my own stuff from one language into the other and vice versa. The advantage lies in the fact that I don't have to go fifty-fifty with Molnar and no thanks are involved. Since I came to America, I have contributed to the *Atlantic Monthly, Century Magazine, McClure's Magazine, Vanity Fair* and many others. I now place *Adventure* on this list with no small pride.

—JOSEPH SZEBENYEI

ANOTHER comrade joins the discussion about slip-shooting and fanning a gun. I think most of us who are at all familiar with authenticated chronicles of famous Western bad men will have to agree with his estimate of their real shooting ability. That their code of combat was in any sense higher than that of the present day gunman in New York or Chicago is gravely open to question.

Sacramento, California

L. P. Holmes and Gene Stebbings have some interesting comments to make on the fabled subject of "fanning" the revolver and both are right in their conclusion that there is nothing to the stunt except the vivid imagination of certain writers of Western tales. I do not claim to know more than a great many others on this subject of what can or can not be done with the six-shooter, but both Mr. Holmes and Mr. Stebbings are in error on certain minor points that I wish to clear up.

I own and have used and played with almost every modern gun known and many of the old time percussion and flintlock guns and I have a large library on the subject and between 1920 and 1929 won the revolver championship of the United States five times and at present hold one World's record (rapid fire) and 2 United States records. So I have a fair idea of what can be done with a revolver. Mr. Stebbings says he never saw any guns minus triggers. Now the triggerless revolver is no myth. It is still used by some misguided cranks who want to attract attention, and very good shooting can be done with it if one practices enough.

The trigger is removed and the hammer is drawn back and allowed to slip from under the thumb. It is possible to fire a string of 5 or 6 shots this way as rapidly almost as with a double action revolver and with better accuracy.

It is hard to get good accuracy when using a double action gun by self-cocking the hammer. I don't like the triggerless "slip-shooting" stuff myself but must admit that one can do fair work with it if one will take the time to practice. A year or two some matches were held in Washington State at a State meet for this style of shooting and the scores were surprisingly good. So much for the triggerless gun.

Mr. Holmes is all wrong when he says that good shooting can be done from the hip. All depends on what you call good shooting. He says he cut out the figure of a man from paper, tacked it on a shed and found he could make it hot for the man when firing

from the hip. Yes, if the man was life size and very close, but that is not fine shooting surely. Try putting up a saucer or a tin can at 40 feet and shooting at it from the hip. You will be surprised to find how far you will miss it. By watching where the bullets strike and carefully altering your hold, you will after a dozen shots be getting close; but move the target and you will have it all to do over again. No, hip shooting is a joke and no man ever lived who was proficient enough to depend on it in a fight except at very close quarters, say 6 to 8 feet.

Mr. Holmes makes a strange statement in saying that he can do much better at flying targets, cans and bottles thrown in the air, when using double action, than when using single action. This is contrary to the experience of most men who find it hard to make a good score when using the gun double action, and prefer to use single action except where extreme speed is needed. In matches where 5 shots are fired at a target in a time limit of 10 seconds, it has been found that the best scores can be made by cocking the gun, single action, for each shot. Using the gun double action in such a match would put a man hopelessly out of it. Of course, if the rules required 5 shots in 2 seconds, double action would be absolutely necessary and at 20 yards the 5 shots would be scattered all over a 10 x 10 foot back stop.

Mr. Stebbings mentions that he never saw any of certain bad men and criminals with guns equipped for fanning or slip-shooting. I often wonder just why criminals and bad men should always be supposed to be fine shots. As a rule, the old time bad men were not good shots. They depended on killing their victims by shooting them in the back or from ambush or taking them by surprise, if in a saloon row, and firing at very short range using a concealed weapon that was already drawn and hidden in the sleeve or hand or some other place. They seldom gave the other man an even break and the notches on their guns only meant so many murders. In Europe, where dueling took place under strict rules, expert swordsmen often had a long list of victims, but when the pistol came in, dueling died out, as the chances of even an expert shot emerging from more than a few encounters unharmed were poor. The bad man of the West who had a long string of victories, gained them by simply murdering his enemies.

Modern revolver shots are incomparably more expert and skilful and deadly than the old-timers. There are hundreds of men today whose skill is far above such men as Wild Bill Hickok or Billy the Kid, men who would plant a half dozen bullets in a space no larger than a coffee saucer at 25 yards before the above mentioned bad men could do more than fire one or two wild shots. An enormous lot of nonsense has been written about Wild Bill. The truth is his weapons were not capable of doing one-tenth of the things credited to him, even if the man himself had the skill. The revolvers and cartridges of his day were not very accurate and at 50 yards even if fastened in a machine rest were not capable of placing 6 consecutive shots into an ordinary tomato can. Today a .38 caliber Colt or Smith & Wesson target revolver with 6 inch barrel at 50 yards will place 6 consecutive shots from a machine rest in a silver dollar.

—CARL W. WAHRER, M. D.

FROM the Library of Congress comes a request for certain issues of *Adventure* to complete its file. Of course we should be very glad to comply, but since we can only supply numbers not farther than a year back, I am passing on the request to our readers. If any of you have the required copies and wish to present them for the above purpose, please address Mr. H. S. Parsons, Chief of the Periodical Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D. C. The issues wanted are: June 10th, 1925; December 15th, 1926; October 1st and November 1st, 1927; December 15th, 1927; and January 15th, 1928.

WE'LL have to leave the following to be adjudicated by some one who has been in this Central American region quite recently. What are the facts?

New York City

I question the accuracy of Charles Bell Emerson's description of the making of water-proof cloth by Central American natives, which he gives in the December 1st *Adventure*. Following that publication, I exchanged letters on the subject with my colleague, Albert Wehde, who lived among the Indians on the Carib shore a dozen years. Wehde says that Mr. Emerson is wrong in stating that "the natives use a brush and paint the juice of the rubber tree on the cloth . . . then slowly smoke it."

Wehde, now traveling in the West, says that a correct description is given in his autobiography, "Since Leaving Home." I find the passage on pp. 243-244. Telling of a journey up the Wanks River in Mosquita in the Nineties, he writes:

"I saw a rubber bag, in the making, stretched on a framework of boughs and lying in the water . . . A bag is made in this manner: A sack of ordinary cotton cloth is covered heavily with the milk of the rubber tree mixed with sulphur. At first this mixture turns jet black. It is then stretched on an improvised frame and put into running water so that nothing may touch its outside. In a couple of days the black turns to an ochre color and the sack, absolutely waterproof, is ready."

Which of these two experts is right? Or are both correct, with dates varying? Have the natives

evolved to the use of brushes and dispensed with sulphur since Wehde was in their midst?

—JOHN NICHOLAS BEFFEL

AN INTERESTING communication from a comrade in Scotland.

Kings Park, Glasgow

Pray excuse a "lang-nebbed" Scot for breaking into the Camp-Fire, but I know you have a "touching passion" for accuracy in your magazine.

The "auld yin" (my father) occasionally snorts in disgust at some far-fetched yarn—he having traveled half round the world and consequently having an idea of the peoples and their customs. For myself, I enjoy most yarns but bar deeds of daring-do by intrepid Yanks on the Western Front. I wonder if some of the authors of so-called war fiction ever saw a battle—apart from the movies. I don't mind tales of behind the Front—these usually teem with humour—I guess if a fellow gets one real laugh out of a yarn it helps him to swallow the impossibles.

A reference is made in one of your stories to the sinking of the *Hampshire* with Lord Kitchener* on board, by a torpedo from a German submarine—the mistake was easy to fall into as the British and German governments' first bulletins re the disaster implied that the loss was due to a torpedo.

The German newspaper *Krenz Zeitung* wrote:

"His death awakens a grim but justifiable joy that the man, who was one of our most dangerous enemies and conscienceless instigators of the present war, has met his death at the *hands of our navy* . . . London, which was already depressed by the bad news from the Skager Rack (Jutland), learns with bitter despair that a ship of the hated German Fleet has brought about the death of the one man upon whom it had placed all its hopes of a favorable outcome of the war . . ."

Later on when the full facts became known, it was officially reported a mine (floating) was responsible for the loss of the *Hampshire.*

It may not be amiss here to remark that the naval authorities in Orkney refused to allow the civilians to rescue the shipwrecked sailors, and they were kept back from the beach by sailors with fixed bayonets; consequently many more perished than would otherwise have been the case. The government's excuse was that one of the civilians might have picked up Kitchener's portfolio and sold it to Germany. For months there was a reward notice posted offering 30,000 pounds for the recovering of the papers.

Pardon any delay in writing, but it is only occasionally I pick up an *Adventure* in the bookstalls here and they're usually out of date. I have written to Frank Babylon of Pittsburgh asking him to send me on his old numbers, so I will get my old favorite regular now.

Why not include a story of the Kilties in France or Mesopotamia? Cruickshank would write you one.

Can you explain the "blood brother" business between the Scots Highlanders and the Goorkhas from Nepal? I believe Kipling gives the story but I have been unable to get it.

Why do you allow the word "mon" to be used? No Scotsman ever uses it. You can get it in every dialect from "min" to "ma-an" but I have never heard it pronounced "mon" yet. This was the only blemish in Hendryx's fine story "Man of the North."

If any reader wants a few items of information about Scotland I will be quite willing to give any particulars requested.

If Nason wants any authentic particulars about the Scots divisions, I will supply 'em. I don't like his oblique references to the British—if he had said English I would not have minded.

Did he ever hear of the French revolt in '17? And we had to carry on the Paschendale mess to keep the Germans from learning the real truth and transferring some of their divisions to that sector and breaking through. Did he ever hear of how the Broadway Boys ran at Reims and the 9th (Scots) division chased them back into the trenches with fixed bayonets? Did he hear how the 9th did the same for the K.R.R.'s? Also how the 4th Irish ran at the Somme in April, 1927, after the 9th had taken the Three Jerry front lines, or how the Lincolns had a marathon back to Paris—nearly—and left the flank of the Seaforths in the air?

Aweel, I'll quit ma bletherin' an' jist subscribe myself,

—SANDY RAMSAY

I ASKED Talbot Mundy about this Goorkhas-Highlanders entente. He is, as you all know, right at home in this period and locale, and the following explanation sheds a bit of light on the subject:

There is not, and never was, so far as I know, an actual blood-brotherhood between the Highlanders and Goorkhas. But they fraternize. It is good form for them to drink together, from the same mug, in the army canteens. Though they seldom speak a word of one another's language, and, perhaps, in part, because of that, they hold an almost holy reverence for one another.

It is, of course, traditional; and, like many another tradition of the Anglo-Indian army, it dates from the Mutiny of '57, when the Goorkhas came as volunteers to die beside the desperate battalions that earned immortal fame on Delhi Ridge. The Goorkhas were given a gap to hold between the Rifle Brigade and the Highlanders, and no man—not even Lord Roberts, in his book on his life in India—has ever attempted to judge which fought with greatest heroism.

When the Mutiny was over and rewards were parceled out, the Goorkhas were invited to suggest some signal honor that Her Majesty the Queen might offer them in recognition of their conduct. They

*The "K" incident occurs in Perry's "Darkened Seas."

asked permission to wear the Rifle Brigade uniform. It was granted, and they wear it to this day, with the only addition of the Goorkha *kukri*, or curved knife. Whether or not their use of bagpipes also dates from that time I can't remember, but I think it does, although I can't find the reference. At any rate, Goorkhas and Highlanders have fought side by side in many a frontier campaign, and "Johnny Goorkha" always grins his admiration of the Highlander, who reciprocates by sharing cordially with the Goorkha his last drink, his last crust, and the front rank of the fighting line.

I DON'T know whether Mr. Ramsey means to imply that the War stories published in our magazine tend to be jingoistic. None of us here in the office (and I know practically all of our readers feel the same way) care much for chauvinism either in theory or in practise. In fact, that quality in a story is more than likely to give us an acute pain. I think we stand in no urgent need of persuasion to the proposition that God has not limited himself in the endowment of courage, or strength, or the spirit of self-sacrifice to the Yanks alone. They are attributes pretty evenly distributed, I daresay, among all the nations and peoples of our little earth.

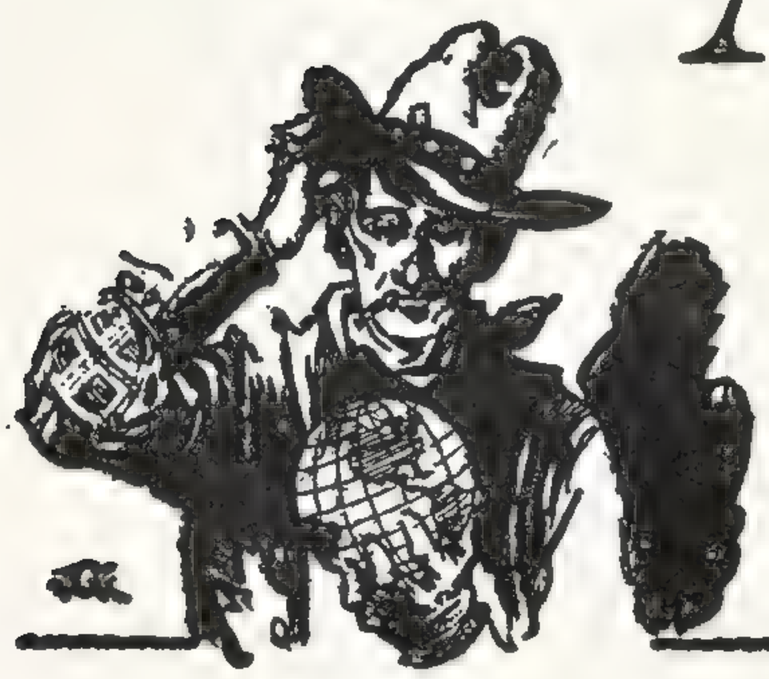
But having agreed to this, will some one be good enough to explain to us just how a story may be construed as jingoistic because in some particular battle an American, or a group of Americans, are described as conducting themselves with conspicuous gallantry? Why must there be an interpolation or a series of footnotes to remind the reader that in that same encounter the Tommies or the poilus, or mayhap, the Senegalese, fought and died valourously? Especially, if their actions are entirely extraneous to the subject of the story in question.

Is anything more absurd than the hullabaloo raised by certain factions in France and England, on the occasion, some time ago, of the presentation in those countries of an American moving picture of the World War? You remember that because only Yanks were depicted in the fictitious battle scenes, a great cry was raised about the unmitigated conceit and bloated patriotism of us Americans. I understand that the producers of the picture, anxious to allay these horrid charges, hastened to insert other scenes (quite irrelevant to the context) showing the French and English in action. Such pettiness is a little hard to understand by intelligent men and women.

If *Adventure* needs any vindication at all, it seems to me it finds it completely in our publication (to mention but one among countless instances) of the novel, "Cry Havoc!" by Redvers. Here is a story of the Canadians, by a Canadian. By no stretch of the imagination could it be called a eulogy of the American people. In truth, it contains as many knocks against us as it does bouquets, with the former perhaps in preponderance. Nonetheless, we found it an exceptional story, as much for its frankness as for its vigor and freshness of viewpoint. In a word, we printed it because we thought it a *good* story for our readers, all other considerations aside; and if the numerous commendatory letters we are receiving daily are any indication, the majority of you think so too.

By the same token, if Mr. Cruickshank or some other writer wishes to contribute a story of the Kilties, his effort will certainly receive every consideration. This is an open invitation, though perhaps it is superfluous to extend it. The pages of *Adventure* have always been wide open to the writer who has a really moving, unusual story of adventure to tell. And we don't give a continental where he hails from, whether the hero of his story is a Hottentot or a Laplander (we've had both in the past), or what his opinion is about "Who won the War?" —A. A. P.

Ask *Adventure*



For free information and services
you can't get elsewhere

South Seas

THE ISLANDS are not the simple sanctuary (for a man without job or money) that the storybooks have led many to believe.

Request:—"Will you please give me some information regarding the living conditions and wages of a mechanic in the South Sea Islands, or chances for an American there?" —RAY WILLIAMS, Chicago, Ill.

Reply, by Mr. J. S. Meagher:—Opportunities for an American to make a living in the South Sea Islands are generally speaking strictly limited. In a majority of these isolated island groups there would be no opportunity at all.

In the few places where there might be some opportunities vacancies are usually filled by men from Europe and the Antipodes; that is Australia and New Zealand. A general handy man would be more apt to make a living than a tradesman in some particular line.

It would be very inadvisable for a man to go down there unless he had an income sufficient to live on or had a definite connection beforehand. In fact, the different island governments have to be satisfied that aliens on entry to the different colonies have sufficient means to live on. A deposit fee system is in force on entry, which insures that the alien will not become a problem to the government in the event he is unable to make a living of some kind.

Living conditions are primitive in many isolated groups and the living standard of the natives low. Such towns as Papeete, Tahiti and Suva, Fijis, however have many of the amenities of civilization, but these are two of the principal points and outside in the widely scattered island groups, you are for the most part in wild undeveloped territory.

Capital is really necessary to get anywhere down there and I would not advise you to go there at all unless you had an income of at least $60.00 a month to live on. Even if a man had capital it would require considerable experience of conditions down there before it would be at all safe to invest it.

Automobile Race

AFTER seven races a driver may secure a permanent racing permit.

Request:—"I would like information on the following subjects in regard to automobile racing:

1. List of important racing drivers and former racers now working for some automobile company.
2. How to go about getting a job with some automobile company in the test driving department.
3. Qualifications of a racer for the Indianapolis Racetrack.
4. Who, if any, of the automobile racers have protégés, or train men for racing careers?"

—EARL W. HASSEL, Canal Zone.

Reply, by Mr. Edmund B. Neil:—1, 2. The number of former and present racing drivers engaged in various lines of work is so large that I cannot attempt to enumerate these men for you. Many of the drivers work for automobile concerns, particularly those companies which have been interested in endurance and performance tests, such as Auburn, Stutz, Packard, Studebaker and others. However, it is not necessary, nor do I think advisable, for anyone to get into automobile racing through automobile manufacturing. Difficult as it is, I think it is easier to do so more directly, namely, actually to enter some of the novice races held throughout the country during the summer of each year in connection with other races scheduled on the day's program, which in turn are for experienced drivers. If you have a car, and believe that you can pass the necessary qualifications, you can enter a race.

3. Briefly, the qualifications are good physical condition, and ability to handle a car during a trial run on the track prior to the time the race is run. Qualifications are passed upon by a representative

of the Contest Board of the A.A.A. who officiates at the track, whose duty it is to see that any novice has sufficient skill to avoid trouble. Other details relative to qualifications can be obtained from the Contest Board. Due to a change in regulations this year, we understand that a permanent race driving permit can be obtained only after seven single day permits have been secured. In other words, you must obtain a permit each time you race until seven races have been run in which you have competed.

No one is permitted to race at Indianapolis until he has obtained a permanent pilot's permit, and also he must practice for at least ten days prior to the race before he is permitted to drive.

4. Some of the better known automobile race drivers have protégés who act as mechanicians, and who may have a chance to act as relief drivers in a big race if they have obtained their permanent or yearly licenses. Licensing of drivers and cars is made annually, and all cars are inspected by an A.A.A. representative before they may be driven.

Great Slave Lake

A SECTION of the North country that offers almost insuperable barriers to the stranger.

Request:—"A friend made me a wager that I could not go to Great Slave Lake and live for one year starting in April.

Have had experience in camping, hunting and trapping in the States, but this will be a new experience for me.

Could you oblige me with the following information:

1. What is the best way to travel to the Caribou Mountains?

2. Is the region heavily forested and is game plentiful enough to make it pay to trap and also what fur bearers are there?

3. What is the average temperature in winter and the depth of snow?

4. What equipment would I need in the line of clothes and for a winter's supply of grub?

5. What size rifle and revolver would you advise—also what are the Canadian game laws?

6. Where could I get maps and other information?"

—WALTER BURDING, Westhampton Beach, N. Y.

Reply, by Mr. C. Plowden:—1. Pack horse, canoe and feet.

2. Trapper's licenses only granted to British subjects.

3. 30° to 40° below; snow 12 to 14 feet.

4. Usual Arctic equipment and full stock of food. Three men with all local experience died last winter because they relied on game.

5. .30-30 rifle. Revolver not allowed or necessary.

6. Write N. W. Mounted Police, Edmonton, Alberta for all details.

I do not think your idea possible—unless you are well versed in that sort of country and are well equipped. The police now reserve to themselves the right to refuse anyone the right to go up there unless satisfied that by experience and equipment they stand a chance of getting out. The main difficulty would be to pack supplies. Personally I have not been there and do not desire to go.

China Clay

ITS uses, and considerations in planning to develop promising deposits.

Request:—"I am interested in a clay deposit near Troy, Idaho, and would like a little information.

This clay contains a large amount of kaolin (china clay) according to tests made at the University. I understand kaolin is used in making paper and is mined quite extensively in England, and imported into this country. The bed I am referring to has been found to cover 27 acres and is estimated to run 100 to 300 feet in depth. Overburden runs from 2 to 6 feet and would be easy to dispose of as the deposit is situated on high ground.

Would sure appreciate any information you might give me on this subject. Could you give me the names of some good books covering this?"—ELMER OLSON, Troy, Idaho.

Reply, by Mr. Victor Shaw:—Your deposit of clay containing kaolin sounds interesting and might be made profitable, or salable, depending upon several important points, chief of which is its natural location; that is, as to whether it may be handled cheaply enough to afford a profit.

The whole clay industry—including the several varieties of the china clay—is highly competitive, with low prices and an over-capacity for production prevailing today. General business conditions are this year determining all production, which is being governed by consumption in the many industries using clay as a raw material. No new uses have been discovered up to the present, but some progress has been apparent in improving known grades of clay by further refining, pulverizing, tinting, bleaching of standard qualities. The use of pulverized clays is increasing rapidly. November quotation on china clay: crude lump, f. o. b. mines, No. 1 @ $7 a ton; washed, @ $8; powdered, @ $8 to $15; ground, @ $7 to $15 a ton.

The china clay group includes kaolin, halloysite and pholerite, which strongly resemble each other and may be distinguished only by careful analysis. Rectorite and newtonite are also similar.

The white clays are used in the manufacture of porcelain, stoneware, firebricks, retorts for gas works, sewer pipes and similar things, and only the pure kaolin is used for giving weight to paper.

Kaolin contains silica and water with nearly 40% alumina. Its colors are white, yellowish, or greenish and bluish, and this year a new variety named "takizolite" has been discovered in Japan, which is rose tinted in appearance. It is true that we import about a million and a half dollars' worth of clay, but

of our domestic product we market over a million and three-quarters dollars' worth at home and export from a half to a million dollars' worth to foreign countries.

If you plan to develop your deposit for operation, or sale, it is necessary to sample properly to determine the amount and purity of the kaolin, as well as the percentage of impurities, boulders contained and other obstacles to cheap handling. Clay industries depend upon nearness to large population centers for value. Availability of fuel is a large factor. Cheap transportation in shape of auto truck roads, navigable rivers, or railroads is an important item. Also, selection of a plant site should be made by a competent engineer, for that is an economic problem of prime importance. You haven't so much overburden and the gross area seems fair, although that should be further tested by systematic boring before venturing further, since the entire value of the deposit depends directly upon cheap handling in future.

Books, outside technical reports published by the U. S. Bureau of Mines, at Washington, D. C., are rather few. The literature on this industry is confined mostly to articles appearing in mining journals.

There is one such in the issue of the Mining & Engineering Journal for March 13, 1926, on Developing a China Clay Deposit in Ontario: and with it is a good short article on how to sample a clay deposit. Another article on the engineering principles applied to Exploitation of a Clay Deposit was published in the E & M Journal for June 12th of 1926; another excellent general article on The Clay Industry appeared in the E & M Journal for Oct. 20, 1928. These may be obtained at 25c each from McGraw-Hill Publishing Co., 370 Seventh Ave., N. Y. C.

Derringer

A DEADLY little close range weapon.

Request:—"Just what is a Derringer?. I often read about gamblers using such a weapon."

—N. JACKMAN, Detroit, Mich.

Reply, by Mr. Donegan Wiggins:—The Derringers were short, light pistols of heavy calibers, and used at close ranges in personal combat.

They were originated by James Derringer, a gunsmith of the better class who lived and worked in Philadelphia, Pa., during the early part of the past century. He made rifles and muskets as well as the pistols, but his fame rests on the pocket arms of high grade that he produced. They were muzzle-loaders, and frequently with two barrels that fitted on one lock and stock; generally one of three inch, and one of six inch.

Later Derringers, and the ones figuring greatly in the old West as gamblers' guns, seem to have been the Remington double barreled .41 caliber, and the Colt and Williamson single shot .41 calibers, all using the old .41 short rimfire. Deadly at close ranges, and very easily concealed; generally worn in a vest pocket, and only used at close ranges.

Weight Man

THE elements of discus throwing.

Request:—"I wonder if you would outline a course, of training for a weight man? What to eat and what to do in the line of exercises.

I go to Troy High School, for which school I throw the discus. I am seventeen years of age and weigh about 190. My best throw so far was 87.5.

Any information which you might give me in this line will be greatly appreciated, as we have no coach." —JOHN E. HORROCKS, Troy, N. Y.

Reply, by Mr. Jackson Scholz:—It is impossible to *tell* a man how to throw the discus, without being personally on hand to correct the defects in his form. There are certain training factors, however, which I should advise.

Always throw from a circle, or from a space whose limits are no greater than those of a discus circle. This will eliminate the chances of fouling in actual competition. Handle the discus as much as possible when not actually throwing it, in order to accustom yourself to its feeling. Take exercises with your left arm to prevent the overdevelopment of your right, as is quite often the case with discus throwers.

Do a bit of sprinting, inasmuch as speed and quick footwork are essential in discus throwing. Do not start your whirl too fast. Work up your speed more or less gradually in the circle, and do not allow your discus to lead your body while whirling. Be sure that you make your throw with both feet on the ground—this gives you the added power of your legs. A downward pressure of your thumb when releasing the discus will tend to keep it flat in the air. Keep your head well up as you let it go. This may be done by following it with your eyes as it leaves your hand.

Plimsoll

THE SHIP load-line, named after the "Sailors' Friend", Samuel Plimsoll, who originated it.

Request:—"To satisfy the rather idle curiosity of a landlubber-stay-at-home reader will you be good enough to discuss the subject of the 'Plimsoll' or 'Plimsoll Mark' which I have seen mentioned in a number of stories lately?

I have, of course, a vague sort of an idea in regard to it—that it is some sort of mark on a ship which represents the safety line in loading. But just what sort of mark is it? Where is it?"

—H. D. PHILLIPS, Delmar, N. Y.

Reply, by Harry E. Rieseberg:—Every ship must be permanently and conspicuously marked with lines of not less than twelve inches in length and one inch in breadth, painted longitudinally on each side of same admidships, or as near thereto as is practicable, and indicating the position of each deck which is above water. The upper edge of each of

these lines shall be level with the upper side of the deck plank next the waterway at the place of marking, and the lines shall be white or yellow on a dark ground, or black on a light ground.

These lines are for the purpose of lawfully gaging the loading of vessels in order to prevent overloading and causing danger of same at sea.

Should you desire to go deeper into this subject I would suggest that you secure from any good library Lloyd's Calendar, in which you will find a complete description of the legal markings of same.

Mamba

AS WITH all other snakes, a little strong, direct sunlight goes a long way with this African reptile.

Request:—"Recently I encountered the statement that mambas like nothing better than a stove-hot old quarry where they may sun themselves. Is this correct? Is the venomous mamba any kin of the rattler? Are there any snakes that actually bask in the sun?" —FRANK C. ADAMS, New York, N. Y.

Reply, by Mr. Clifford H. Pope:—The mamba belongs to the same group of snakes that the cobra does, but it is not really a cobra. This group is characterized by the possession of a comparatively short rigid poison fang in the front of each upper jaw. It is not, then, kin to the rattler, which is a pit viper. The vipers possess long *erectile*, hollow fangs also in the front of the upper jaw. The American coral snakes belong to the so-called cobra family. Africa is nevertheless inhabited by species of real cobras.

The amount of sun that a snake will tolerate varies with four factors: the season, degree of latitude, time of day and position of the snake in relation to the sun's rays. Each species of snake would differ in its capacity to stand direct sun under any given condition, so you see the matter is not so simple. It is true, however, that the love of snakes for hot sun is much overrated and there is no easier way to kill one than to confine it and then expose it to direct sunlight.

In nature there generally are mitigating circumstances. For example, rattlesnakes are reputed to be fond of basking on exposed rocky ledges. This is undoubtedly true during the first warm days of the spring and the last mild spell in the fall when the air is cool. Again, water snakes often bask on bushes overhanging creeks, but there the foliage, flowing water and free circulation of air serve to reduce the strength of the sun. People say "not a breath of air" to describe heat devoid of circulation, yet at the seashore the same absolute degree of heat would not be noticed, thanks to a good breeze.

Snakes do not possess an efficient regulating mechanism comparable to that of man (mammals) and consequently are not so well equipped to stand either excessive heat or cold. They are forced to avoid any extreme. If you touch a snake that has died of exposure to sun you will find that its body is very hot, much as an iron bar would be under similar circumstances.

Mambas are arboreal as well as terrestrial. They undoubtedly bask in the sun to a limited extent. Such a phrase as "like nothing better" is catchy but not applicable in this case because a hot African sun would probably kill a confined mamba just as the California sun is too much for Western rattlers.

Houseboat

ADDITIONAL information on floating down the Ohio-Mississippi.

Request:—"I received your letter of the 28th of December and thank you kindly. However, I find that there are more things I want to ask you about and hope that you will kindly answer them.

In your letter you said, 'It is advisable to speak with the locktenders, as they are the ones who lock your craft through.' Can you tell me what you meant by 'speak?'

How big should my boat be? Twenty feet by ten long enough? What is the usual size of houseboats; not the big, palatial ones, but ones similar to what mine would be?

Also another thing in your letter I did not understand. 'Be careful when you tie up, as an inviting looking bank before morning might have pulled you and the boat with it into the depths of the river.' Do you mean it would cave in?

Is there a toll charge to pass through the locks on the Ohio?

Do the houseboats usually float down the river? Can they be steered when floating? I hope you will not laugh at me if I am wrong, but I heard or read years ago that anything floating on water, having the same speed as the current, could not be steered. Am I right?

If I am right, then how is a boat maneuvered to the bank?

What size and length and kind of rope should be used in tying up for the night?

And when tied up for the night, are 'riding lights' necessary to show you are there?

What sort of lights should you think I ought to have on the boat for spotlights, etc.? I intend to have one or more six volt car batteries and intend to wire up some car spotlights but want advice as to the best places, on the roof or on the little porch at each end?

What kind of apparatus should I have for steering? An ordinary tiller connected directly to the rudder, or a more elaborate affair with cables attached to rudder and running forward to a wheel in front?

I read a few weeks ago of a knot used by rivermen to moor their boat with. This knot was such that it would be loosened *from* the *boat*, rather than the usual knot that would be tied ashore and I would have to be unfastened there. Can you tell me how to tie one?

Where can I get the rules of navigation? Such as passing another boat, how close, running across current to get to other side, etc.?"

—LEONARD PEAK, Charleston, Ill.

Reply, by Mr. George A. Zerr:—By speaking with the lockmaster, you may gain a lot of information, (which is only gained by being on the ground) as to your intended course. Since there are rules as to the time of locking pleasure craft through, he might be kind enough to permit placing your boat alongside of other craft. Since this locking is free, speaking might help. In regard to the construction of a boat, why not purchase the book published by Raymond S. Spears (See *Ask Adventure* directory) "The Cabin Boat Primer," which will give you valuable information.

Yes, I mean caving banks are dangerous. The Government maintains the locks and they are free. Boats are maneuvered to the bank by means of your rudder or oars and an ordinary tiller connected to your rudder running forward would be sufficient. Run your line through small pulleys. I believe the Government requires riding lights on small craft, since you might be run down by larger boats and because your craft is riding low. Your batteries might run down; why not use oil lanterns and place them on small poles on the roof. Since I advised an outboard motor, it is advisable to write to your nearest U. S. Collector of Customs and have your boat registered. The costs are negligible. By writing to the U. S. Steamboat Inspectors, Louisville, you may get a copy of the Rules of Navigation. In regard to a line, fifty feet should be sufficient and the use of a tie knot can be shown easier than written. When talking to the locktenders they might show you how.

It also is advisable to carry a small anchor or weight, in case you are disabled or wish to stop in midstream.

Our Experts—They have been chosen by us not only for their knowledge and experience but with an eye to their integrity and reliability. We have emphatically assured each of them that his advice or information is not to be affected in any way by whether a commodity is or is not advertised in this magazine.

They will in all cases answer to the best of their ability, using their own discretion in all matters pertaining to their sections, subject only to our general rules for "Ask Adventure," but neither they nor the magazine assume any responsibility beyond the moral one of trying to do the best that is possible.

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2. **Where to Send**—Send each question direct to the expert in charge of the particular section whose field covers it. He will reply by mail. DO NOT send questions to this magazine.
3. **Extent of Service**—No reply will be made to requests for partners, for financial backing, or for chances to join expeditions. "Ask Adventure" covers business and work opportunities, but only if they are outdoor activities, and only in the way of general data and advice. It is in no sense an employment bureau.
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Salt and Fresh Water Fishing *Fishing-tackle and equipment; fly and bait casting; bait; camping-outfits; fishing-trips.*—JOHN B. THOMPSON ("Ozark Ripley"), care *Adventure.*

Small Boating *Skiff, outboard, small launch river and lake cruising.*—RAYMOND S. SPEARS, Inglewood, California.

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Yachting HENRY W. RUBINKAM, Chicago Yacht Club, Box 507, Chicago, Ill.

Motor Boating GEORGE W. SUTTON, 232 Madison Ave., Room 801, New York City.

Motor Camping JOHN D. LONG, 610 W. 116th St., New York City.

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All Shotguns *including foreign and American makes; wing shooting.* JOHN B. THOMPSON, care *Adventure.*

All Rifles, Pistols and Revolvers *including foreign and American makes.*—DONEGAN WIGGINS, R. F. D. 3, Box 75, Salem, Ore.

Edged Weapons, *pole arms and armor.*—ROBERT E. GARDNER, 835 Gladden Road, Grandview, Columbus, Ohio.

First Aid on the Trail *Medical and surgical emergency care, wounds, injuries, common illnesses, diet, pure water, clothing, insect and snake bite; industrial first aid and sanitation for mines, logging camps, ranches and exploring parties as well as for camping trips of all kinds. First-aid outfits. Health hazard of the outdoor life, arctic, temperate and tropical zones.*—CLAUDE P. FORDYCE, M. D., Falls City, Neb.

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Mining and Prospecting *Territory anywhere on the continent of North America. Questions on mines, mining law, mining, mining methods or practise; where and how to prospect; how to outfit; how to make the mine after it is located; how to work it and how to sell it; general geology necessary for miner or prospector; any question on any mineral.*—VICTOR SHAW, Loring, Alaska.

Precious Stones *Their mining, cutting, polishing and all technical information regarding them.*—F. G. ESTERLIN, 210 Post Street, San Francisco, Cal.

Forestry in the United States *Big-game hunting, guides and equipment; national forests of the Rocky Mountain States. Questions on the policy of the Government regarding game and wild animal life in the forests.*—ERNEST W. SHAW, South Carver, Mass.

Tropical Forestry *Tropical forests and forest products; their economic possibilities; distribution, exploration, etc.*—WILLIAM R. BARBOUR, Haitian Agricultural Corporation, Cap-Haitien, Haiti.

Railroading in the U. S., Mexico and Canada *General office, especially immigration, work; advertising work, duties of station agent, bill clerk, ticket agent, passenger brakeman and rate clerk. General Information.*—R. T. NEWMAN, P. O. Drawer, 368, Anaconda, Mont.

Army Matters, United States and Foreign CAPTAIN GLEN R. TOWNSEND, Fort Snelling, Minn.

Navy Matters *Regulations, history, customs, drill, gunnery; tactical and strategic questions, ships, propulsion, construction, classification; general information. Questions regarding the enlisted personnel and officers except such as contained in the Register of Officers can not be answered. Maritime law.*—LIEUT. FRANCIS GREENE, U. S. N. R., 231 Eleventh St., Brooklyn, N. Y.

U. S. Marine Corps CAPT. F. W. HOPKINS, 507 No. Harper, Hollywood, Cal.

Aviation *Airplanes; airships; airways and landing fields; contests; Aero Clubs; insurance; laws; licenses; operating data; schools; foreign activities; publications. No questions on stock promotion.*—LIEUTENANT JEFFREY R. STARKS, 1408 "N" Street, N. W., Washington, D. C.

State Police FRANCIS H. BENT, JR., care *Adventure.*

Royal Canadian Mounted Police PATRICK LEE, 3758 81st Street, Jackson Heights, New York City.

Horses *Care, breeding, training of horses in general; hunting, jumping, and polo; horses of the old and new West.*—THOMAS H. DAMERON, 7 Block "S", Pueblo, Colo.

Dogs JOHN B. THOMPSON, care *Adventure.*

American Anthropology North of the Panama Canal *Customs, dress, architecture, pottery and decorative arts, weapons and implements, fetishism, social divisions.*—ARTHUR WOODWARD, Los Angeles Museum, Exposition Park, Los Angeles, Cal.

Taxidermy SETH BULLOCK, care *Adventure.*

Herpetology *General information concerning reptiles and amphibians; their customs, habits and distribution.*—CLIFFORD H. POPE, American Museum of Natural History, New York, N. Y.

Ichthyology *Fishes and lower aquatic vertebrates.*—GEORGE S. MYERS, Stanford University, Box 821, Calif.

Stamps H. A. DAVIS, The American Philatelic Society, 3421 Colfax Ave., Denver, Colo.

Coins and Medals HOWLAND WOOD, American Numismatic Society, Broadway at 156th St., New York City.

Radio *Telegraphy, telephony, history, broadcasting, apparatus, invention, receiver construction, portable sets.*—DONALD MCNICOL, 132 Union Road, Roselle Park, N. J.

Photography *Information on outfitting and on work in out-of-the-way places. General information.*—PAUL L. ANDERSON, 36 Washington St., East Orange, New Jersey.

Linguistics and Ethnology *(a) Racial and tribal tradition, history and psychology; folklore and mythology. (b) Languages and the problems of race migration, national development and descent (authorities and bibliographies). (c) Individual languages and language-families; interrelation of tongues, their affinities and plans for their study.*—DR. NEVILLE WHYMANT, 345 W. 23rd St., New York City.

Old Songs That Men Have Sung ROBERT W. GORDON, care of *Adventure.*

Football JOHN B. FOSTER, American Sports Pub. Co., 45 Rose Street, New York City.

Baseball FREDERICK LIEB, *The Evening Telegram*, 73 Dey Street, New York City.

Track JACKSON SCHOLZ, 73 Farmington Ave., Longmeadow, Mass.

Tennis FRED HAWTHORNE, Sports Dept., New York *Herald Tribune*, New York City.

Basketball I. S. ROSE, 321 Euclid Ave., Cleveland, Ohio.

Bicycling ARTHUR J. LEAMOND, 469 Valley St., South Orange, New Jersey.

Swimming LOUIS DEB. HANDLEY, 260 Washington St., N. Y. C.

Skating FRANK SCHREIBER, 2226 Clinton Ave., Berwyn, Ill.

Skiing and Snowshoeing W. H. PRICE, 3436 Mance St., Montreal, Quebec.

Hockey "DANIEL," *The Evening Telegram*, 73 Dey St., New York City.

Archery EARL B. POWELL, 524 West 3rd St., Los Angeles, Cal.

Boxing JAMES P. DAWSON, The New York *Times*, Times Square, New York City.

Fencing JOHN V. GROMBACH, 1061 Madison Ave., New York City.

The Sea Part 1 *American Waters.* Also ships, seamen, shipping; nautical history, seamanship, navigation, small boat sailing; commercial fisheries of North America.—HARRY E. RIESEBERG, Apt. 504, 2115 F Street N. W., Washington, D. C.

The Sea Part 2 *Statistics and records of American shipping; names, tonnages, dimensions, service, crews, owners of all American documental steam, motor, sail, yacht and unrigged merchant vessels. Vessels lost, abandoned, sold to aliens and all Government owned vessels.*—HARRY E. RIESEBERG.

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The Sea Part 5 *The Mediterranean; Islands and Coasts.*—CAPT. DINGLE, care *Adventure.*

The Sea Part 6 *Arctic Ocean. (Siberian Waters).*—CAPT. C. L. OLIVER, care *Adventure.*

Hawaii DR. NEVILLE WHYMANT, care *Adventure.*

South Sea Islands JAMES STANLEY MEAGHER, 4322 Pine Street, Inglewood, Calif.

Philippine Islands BUCK CONNOR, Universal City, California.

Borneo CAPT. BEVERLEY GIDDINGS, care *Adventure.*

★**New Guinea** *Questions regarding the policy of the Government proceedings of Government officers not answered.*—L. P. B. ARMIT, Port Moresby, Territory of Papua, via Sydney, Australia.

★**New Zealand, Cook Islands, Samoa.** TOM L. MILLS, *The Fielding Star*, Fielding, New Zealand.

★**Australia and Tasmania** ALAN FOLEY, 18a Sandbridge Street, Bondi, Sydney, Australia.

Asia Part 1 *Siam, Andamans, Malay Straits, Straits Settlements, Shan States; and Yunnan.*—GORDON MACCREAGH, 21 East 14th St., New York.

Asia Part 2 *Java, Sumatra, Dutch East Indies in general, India, Kashmir.*—CAPT. R. W. VAN RAVEN DE STURLER, 140 W. 75th St., New York, N. Y.

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★**Asia Part 6** *Northern China and Mongolia.*—GEORGE W. TWOMEY, M. D., U. S. Veterans' Hospital, Fort Snelling, Minn., and DR. NEVILLE WHYMANT, care *Adventure.*

★**Asia Part 7** *Japan.*—SIDNEY HERSCHEL SMALL, San Rafael, Calif., and OSCAR E. RILEY, 4 Huntington Ave., Scarsdale, New York.

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Asia Minor.—DR. NEVILLE WHYMANT, care *Adventure.*

Africa Part 1 *Egypt.*—DR. NEVILLE WHYMANT, care *Adventure.*

Africa Part 2 *Abyssinia, French Somaliland.*—CAPT. R. W. VAN RAVEN DE STURLER, 140 W. 75th St., New York, N. Y.

✠**Africa Part 3** *Sudan.* W. T. MOFFAT, Opera House, Southport, Lancashire, England.

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Africa Part 8 *Cape Colony, Orange River Colony, Natal, Zululand, Transvaal and Rhodesia.*—CAPTAIN F. J. FRANKLIN, Adventure Camp, Box 107, Santa Susana, Cal.

✠**Africa Part 9** *Portuguese East.*—R. G. WARING, 14837 Grand River Ave., Detroit, Michigan.

Madagascar RALPH LINTON, 324 Sterling Hall, University of Wisconsin, Madison, Wis.

Europe Part 1 *Jugo-Slavia and Greece.*—LIEUT. WM. JENNA, Fort Clayton, Panama, C. Z.

Europe Part 2 *Albania.*—ROBERT S. TOWNSEND, 1447 Irving Street, Washington, D. C.

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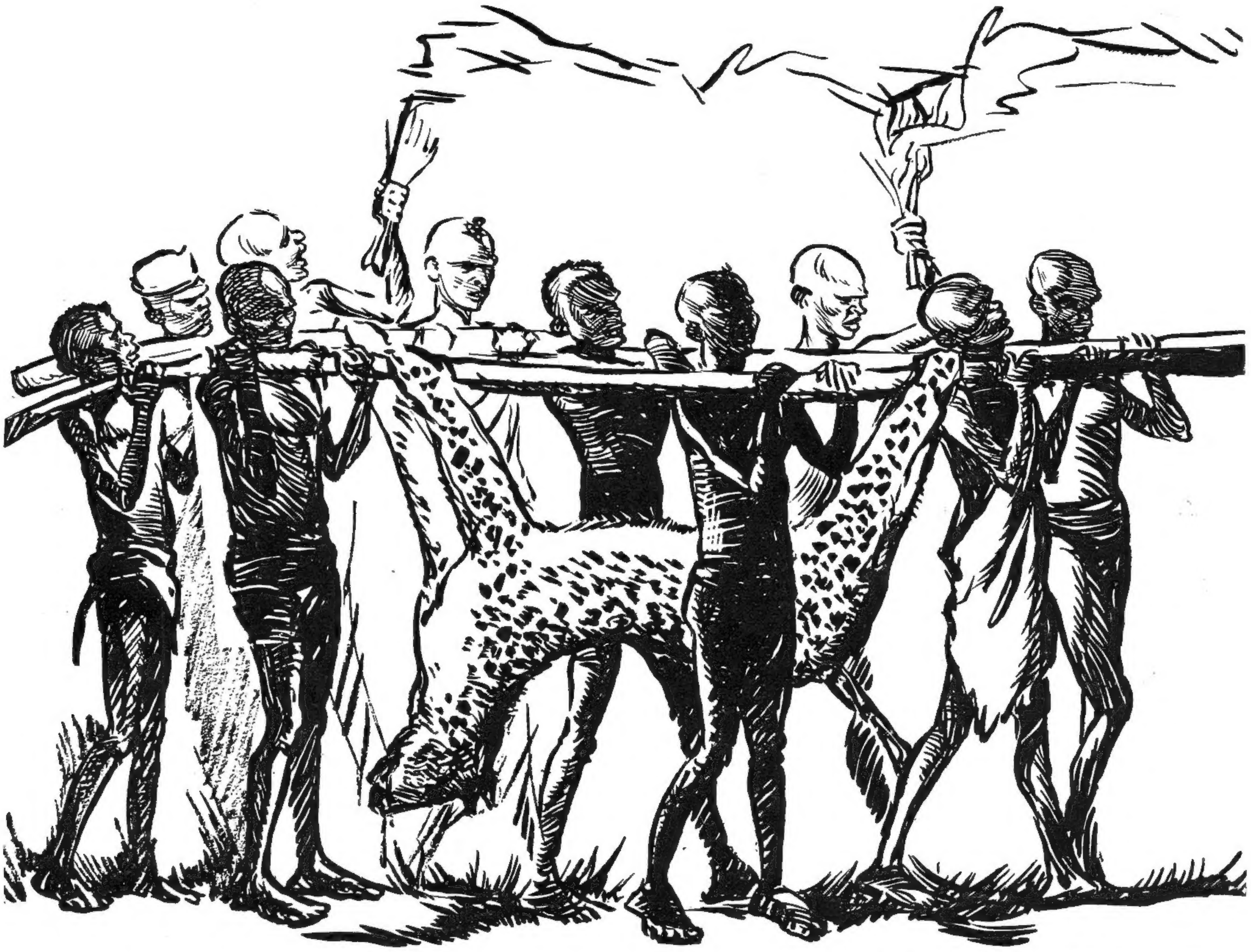

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